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The Guardian

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Firefighters raise alarm over surge in ‘unprecedented’ summer blazes

Caroline Davies
Matthew Pearce
Pippa Neill

Firefighters are under increased pressure as a result of an “unprecedented summer of dangerous and volatile wildfires”, the Fire Brigades Union has warned as the UK braces for a fifth heatwave of the summer.

As the authorities declared almost three-quarters of England was now in drought, Steve Wright, the FBU general secretary, said the unpredictable environmental challenges the UK was now confronted with meant it was a “national priority” to have enough properly equipped firefighters to “face these threats”.

More than 120 firefighters continued to tackle a “devastating” blaze in the New Forest national park in Hampshire, which began on Sunday. Nottinghamshire fire and rescue service also declared a major incident on Sunday as two large fires in woodland near Mansfield put a significant strain on resources there.

Emergency calls to the London fire brigade (LFB) increased by almost a third this summer as firefighters battled a surge in wildfires and flooding in the capital, according to an internal briefing seen by the Guardian.

The document warned that the brigade has come under mounting pressure from extreme weather and predicts the trend will continue because of the climate crisis. Between 1 April and 9 July, the service received 75,652 emergency calls - 31% more than the previous five-year average - while the number of incidents rose by nearly a quarter to 42,943.

London firefighters responded to 392 wildfires during the period, alongside 68 water rescues, the briefing said, as repeated spells of hot weather and heavy thunderstorms stretched the service’s resources.

The climate breakdown has been linked to the increasing frequency of wildfires, burning larger areas, across many parts of the world. The so-called “fire wave” under way in the UK is the most widespread the country has ever seen, with the combination of wet winters and prolonged heatwaves

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Quake rocks Colombia

National disaster declared as more than 100 killed and many trapped in collapsed buildings

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▶ ***Residents and rescue workers search through the rubble in the city of Cali yesterday***

PHOTOGRAPH: SANTIAGO SALDARRIAGA/AP

Pressure on Banks over surveillance of reporters

Daniel Boffey
Chief reporter

The businessman and Reform UK backer Arron Banks is facing calls to lay out the extent of his surveillance of journalists, which has been described by an industry body as an “attack on our democracy”.

The News Media Association (NMA), which represents regional and national media, raised concerns after Banks appeared to admit at the weekend to hiring private investigators to spy on a Sunday Times journalist.

The revelation, first reported in the New Statesman, has led to fears that other journalists examining the funding of Reform and Nigel Farage, including those at the Guardian, could have been targeted.

When asked over the weekend whether he had commissioned investigators to surveil reporters at the Guardian, Banks - a Reform UK member and former mayoral candidate - said he was “not really interested in the Guardian” but declined to comment further.

The Guardian, along with the Sunday Times, has broken a series of stories in

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PC Harper’s killers must be released, No 10 told

Rajeev Syal
Home affairs editor

Andy Burnham has been warned that changing the terms of the prisoners’ early release scheme so PC Andrew Harper’s killers are kept in jail would force another spate of early releases before the next general election.

Prison Service officials have told No 10 that adding an exemption so those convicted of manslaughter, such as Jessie Cole and Albert Bowers, remain in jail would mean further early releases would be needed within 18 months.

Governors said the prime minister’s decision last week to exempt rapists and serious child sex offenders would force thousands of sentences to be recalculated in haste and could lead to the mistaken early release of some prisoners.

Yesterday Downing Street said the prime minister had “pushed hard on what more we could do”, but it was not possible to exempt “one or two offenders” from early release because manslaughter of an emergency worker was not a standalone offence. Instead, if they wanted to block the

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A wildfire near Ebbw Vale, Blaenau Gwent, which started at the weekend. The number of fires around the UK triggered calls for more firefighters trained to cope with the threat
PHOTOGRAPH: SWNS

Firefighters raise alarm over surge in 'unprecedented' heatwave blazes

Continued *from page 1*

exacerbating the risk. In recent weeks large blazes have broken out in places including Dunwich Heath in Suffolk, Headon Warren on the Isle of Wight, Llanwonno in the Rhondda valley and the Cairngorms national park.

The National Drought Group, which met yesterday, said 71.3% of England was now experiencing a "flash drought", which develops very quickly brought about by a combination of very low rainfall and higher temperatures.

About 45 million people live in a drought area, while more than 27 million are now under restrictions on water use.

The group said all regions of the country were experiencing pressure on water resources, with increasing impacts on agriculture, public supplies, navigation and the environment.

Tony Grayling, the chair of the group, said: "Drought conditions are worsening and will continue to do so until we see significant and sustained rainfall. We know the hot and dry weather is taking a real toll on farming and there will be long-lasting impacts on our environment."

He urged everyone to use less water to "make sure our current water reserves last".

No 10 said the dry conditions were having a "significant impact on communities, farmers and businesses across the country", adding: "Our climate is changing. Droughts are becoming more common."

The prime minister's spokesperson said the government was focused on "both the immediate response and long-term resilience", including working through the National Drought Group to "protect water supplies and minimise environmental damage".

Joanne Smith, the LFB's deputy assistant commissioner for control and mobilising, said it had responded to "thousands of emergency calls" and "hundreds of wildfires alongside water rescues and other significant incidents", adding: "We have learned from previous events such as the summer of 2022 and developed our training for firefighters and officers to enhance their knowledge of tactical awareness at wildfires.

"We've invested in new equipment and training to help tackle wildfires, and we will continue to evolve so that we are ready and prepared."

Wright said firefighters were "having extra demands put on them as a result of an unprecedented summer of dangerous and volatile wildfires" and called for "increased funding, improved access to the best equipment and better national resilience" to combat rising demands. "Our country is facing unpredictable environmental challenges and it must be a national priority to ensure we have enough properly equipped firefighters to face these threats," he said.

Wright has previously said fire crews were stretched by staffing cuts – with 12,000 fewer firefighters in the UK than in 2010.

In Hampshire, hundreds of people were forced to abandon vehicles and walk after Sunday's wildfire caused by a van fire on the A31 near Ringwood spread to nearby New Forest heathland and affected an area the size of 140 football pitches. Twenty-six fire engines and four water carriers were called to the scene, which was scaled down to 10 engines and 13 off-road vehicles by yesterday.

A fire service spokesperson said last night: "We expect to have a significant presence for several days, as we work to protect this beautiful part of the New Forest."

Amber heat health alerts have been issued for the East Midlands, east of England, Yorkshire and the Humber, London, north-west, south-east, south-west, and West Midlands, while a yellow heat health alert has been issued for the north-east, from 9am today until 9pm on Friday.

The Met Office said it was expecting temperatures of 36C in some areas after a relatively cool start to the week, with the heat peaking on Thursday. England and Wales have had their driest July in records dating back to 1836, with 19 counties of England seeing no rain for the month, provisional statistics have shown.

Southern England also had its hottest July on record, while it was the joint hottest on record for Wales, and the UK and England had their second hottest July, Met Office figures show.

A spokesperson for the mayor of London said: "The extreme heat is presenting incredible challenges for our emergency services, with a huge rise in demand." The mayor had provided "record funding" to ensure LFB was better equipped and improve training, they added.

Additional reporting **Aletha Adu**

News Eyewitness *Pages 20-21* →

Three-quarters of England in drought as fifth heatwave due

Pippa Neill
Environment reporter

Almost three-quarters of England is now in drought, as much of Europe braces for its fifth climate crisis-driven heatwave this summer.

Four more regions of England have officially been declared to be in drought: the East Midlands, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, Kent and East Sussex, and Solent and the South Downs.

They join seven regions already under drought status since last month: East Anglia, Hertfordshire and London, Thames Valley, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Devon and Cornwall, the West Midlands, and Wessex (covering Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and south Gloucestershire).

Farmers have reported their earliest harvests in 20 years, with reduced yields, while reservoir levels have fallen to 69% – 11.6% lower than expected for this time of year.

Yorkshire and the North East have joined Cumbria and Lancashire and Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire in prolonged dry weather status – the stage before drought – meaning nowhere in England is deemed to be in normal status.

This flash drought, which developed quickly because of very low rainfall and higher temperatures, means 27 million people have restrictions on their water use.

Prof Liz Bentley, the chief executive of the Royal Meteorological Society, said it was a "stark reminder that climate change isn't just about rising temperatures – it's making droughts develop faster and hit harder. With three droughts in the past five years, we're seeing the growing influence of a changing climate. We need to adapt to more frequent periods of extreme heat and drought while taking action to reduce the emissions driving these changes."

Southern Water has applied for two drought orders. The first is to maintain normal abstraction rates from the River Test even during low river flows and the second is for a non-essential use ban. Both are under consideration by the government. South East Water said last week supplies in its area were "critically low" and warned customers they might lose supply unless demand dropped.

The drought announcement comes as England braces for its fifth heatwave of the summer, with temperatures possibly exceeding 36C (96.8F) in some places. This year there have been 34 days where temperatures have reached 30C or above somewhere in England, including 13 consecutive days in July.

69%
The level to which reservoirs have fallen – 11.6% lower than expected for this time of year

27m
The number of people in England who have now had restrictions imposed on their water use

Rivers, reservoirs and groundwaters are also continuing to decline, with 22% of rivers now classed as exceptionally low.

Glenn Watts, the director of water science at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, said river flows across England and Wales were approaching or worse than previous record lows set in 1976.

Many other parts of Europe are also bracing for another heatwave. The French national weather agency said yesterday that temperatures in the south-east could reach 35C, spreading further across the country, while Italy and coastal Croatia are already experiencing extreme heat. Slovakia, Austria and Hungary have registered record temperatures in recent days.

Additional reporting **Andrew Gregory**

Pet detectives: dogs can tell fearful from angry or sad human faces, research finds

▼ *A border collie sits in an MRI scanner for research in which dogs' brain activity was measured*

PHOTOGRAPH: LAURA V CUAYA

▲ *Above and right, thousands of years of domestication have resulted in dogs and humans forming strong bonds*

PHOTOGRAPHS: JESSICA PETERSON; OLIVER ROSSI/ GETTY IMAGES

Nicola Davis
Science correspondent

While humans keep a close eye on their pets, it seems our pets are keeping a close eye on us too, as a study has revealed dog brains can distinguish between different types of unhappy human expressions.

Dogs whose brain activity was monitored not only distinguished happy faces from other expressions, but could tell fearful faces apart from those that are angry or sad, researchers found.

Dr Laura Cuaya said: "This is the first demonstration that the dog brain can distinguish between emotions from the same valence [positive or negative character]," she said.

Writing in the journal iScience, Cuaya and colleagues from the University of Vienna described working with pet dogs that had been trained to lie still, awake and unrestrained, within an MRI scanner.

In the first experiment, eight dogs were shown five sets of happy faces and five sets of neutral faces. Each set contained four photos of humans that were unfamiliar to the dog but were of the same gender as their primary caregiver. This was repeated five times for each dog.

The results revealed increased activity in certain parts of the brain when the dogs were shown happy faces compared with neutral ones.

Cuaya said these areas were associated with higher visual processing, social processing and reward processing – suggesting the dog was experiencing something positive.

Dr Raúl Hernández Pérez, the first author of the study, said the results raised another question, however: "We don't know if these regions are related just to happy faces or to emotional faces in general."

The team then carried out a second MRI experiment involving 12 dogs. Each was shown new sets of unfamiliar male and female human faces, this time bearing four different expressions: happiness, sadness, fear and anger.

The researchers used machine learning to analyse activity in the same brain regions identified in the first experiment, revealing that the animals could distinguish happy faces from each negative expression – but could not distinguish between different types of unhappy face.

'Dogs have been shaped to understand human behaviour'

Prof Bridget Waller
Social behaviour expert

However, when activity across the whole dog brain was analysed, the researchers found it was possible to distinguish between sad v fearful faces, and angry v fearful faces – but not between angry and sad faces.

Hernández said different negative expressions may trigger different responses in dogs as they represented different types of threat.

Cuaya said previous behavioural studies had shown dogs can tell apart some human facial expressions, but that they tended to only test two at a time, one positive and one negative.

The authors said it might be harder for dogs to tell apart two human facial expressions if they were both negative or both positive, and dogs might also need additional information – such as body language – to distinguish anger from sadness.

The research has limitations, including its small sample size; the fact that most of the dogs were border collies, and all were healthy and without behavioural problems.

Cuaya said the study could have practical implications: for example, expressing happiness when training a dog could aid the learning process.

Bridget Waller, a professor of evolution and social behaviour at Nottingham Trent University, who was not involved in the study, described the work as fascinating, saying it showed how "dogs have been shaped through domestication to understand human behaviour".

"Smiling is the most commonly used human facial expression, vital to our social interactions, and so it makes sense that dogs have developed a particular ability to distinguish this from other facial movements," she said. "It seems less clear that they can distinguish between the other expressions, and this would make sense as these are less commonly produced in human social interaction."

Elf and safety: new power cable moved to avoid Dobby's 'grave'

Helena Horton

Harry Potter fans have forced a new multimillion-pound power cable between the UK and Ireland to be relocated after complaining it would desecrate the "grave" of Dobby, a fictional elf.

▲ *Pebbles reading 'Here Lies Dobby' on Freshwater West beach in Wales*

The character was laid to rest on Freshwater West beach in Pembrokeshire, Wales, in the film Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Fans of the wizard series come to leave stones reading "Here Lies Dobby" despite being asked not to by the National Trust, because the beach is an ecologically sensitive site.

The £430m Greenlink interconnector, which links the National Grid to Ireland, was initially going to pass through the site of the "grave", the project manager Simon Ludlam told the Energy Revolution podcast.

Fans became aware of the plans after Ludlam pointed out where the 125-mile (200km) cable to County Wexford would go underground at Freshwater West during a BBC interview. "We did the shot, we finished, I went back to London, and they then aired it a couple of weeks later. And we got hundreds of calls, I mean, hundreds of calls."

▲ *Dobby was laid to rest on the beach in the final Harry Potter movie*

Ludlam said he did not know who Dobby was, and became confused by the calls the company received, saying a colleague told him: "Apparently we're going to go straight through Dobby's grave".

The firm then enlisted planners to find a new route that avoided the supposed grave.

"A lot of people were very happy about that, and the project is now going [ahead] and Dobby's happy," Ludlam added.

More than 100 dead as 7.4-magnitude earthquake strikes western Colombia

Tom Phillips
Thomas Graham *Bogotá*

From top, a collapsed building in Manizales, Colombia; a tower of the city's cathedral that fell during yesterday's earthquake; residents dig for survivors in the third-biggest city, Cali

PHOTOGRAPHS: GIOVANNY GALVEZ/AFP/GETTY; JOHN JAIRO BONILLA/AP; JUAN PABLO ARBELAEZ/REUTERS

More than 100 people have been killed after a powerful earthquake struck western Colombia, with collapsed and severely damaged buildings in major cities trapping many victims under the rubble.

The US and Colombian geological surveys reported that the 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck at 7.34am local time yesterday, with its epicentre in the western department of Chocó. It was recorded at a depth of 66 miles.

The earthquake was also felt in neighbouring Venezuela, which is still reeling from a deadly double earthquake on 24 June.

Colombia's new president, Abelardo de la Espriella, said at least 111 people had been killed and 87 injured. He added that 61 buildings had collapsed.

The president declared an emergency, which will expedite funding for the quake recovery, and said he would visit the disaster zone, which is centred on the rural region of Chocó.

"The national government has all of its capabilities deployed to protect lives, assist affected communities and deliver aid wherever it is needed," he said in a national address from the capital, Bogotá. "The first priority is rescuing the people trapped under the rubble."

The number of fatalities continued to rise yesterday, with at least 42 people killed in Risaralda, where the hard-hit city of Pereira is located.

More people died in the Valle del Cauca region, where Colombia's third-biggest city, Cali, is located. At least three of them were children.

Authorities also confirmed deaths in the Caldas and Antioquia regions. Many more people across the country were injured.

The quake left cities across the west of the country – Pereira, Quibdó, Cali and Manizales – ravaged. Residents and search teams picked through the rubble of collapsed buildings despite fears of aftershocks.

Colombia's interior minister said more than 20 municipalities across the country had been hit.

Manizales mayor Jorge Eduardo Rojas Giraldo said at least 12 buildings and 20 homes had been partially or completely or destroyed there.

The earthquake caused a tower of Manizales' beloved cathedral, the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, to fall over.

In footage posted to social media, Giraldo told residents to be "completely ready" for aftershocks. "Do not go back into the buildings yet. I know this isn't easy but stay outside for a little while at least because there could be an aftershock," he said.

Social media videos showed people searching for victims in the wreckage of a four-storey hotel in Cali, and a woman sprinting from a building as it collapsed in Manizales.

Jorge Moncayo, a 64-year-old taxi driver in Cali, said he saw plumes of dust shoot up across the city as buildings collapsed. Residents and rescue workers were searching the rubble for survivors.

"My entire house shook. I've never lived through such a powerful earthquake," he said. "We're thanking God we're alive."

Raúl Andrés Buitrago, the head of customer service at a business in Pereira, recalled how he was setting off for work when the seismic alert on his watch went off.

"There are often little tremors here. But I'd never felt an earthquake like this. It started softly, softly, softly, then it felt like it was getting stronger every second," he said.

Buitrago recalled seeing "horrible" scenes as he fled outside on to the street in Pereira's city centre, which is home to many old buildings. "The roofs started to fall in. The buildings collapsed in on themselves. The panic was terrible. They were the four longest minutes of my life," he said.

The mayor of Cali, Alejandro Eder, said at least 20 buildings had collapsed in his city and that some people were trapped inside.

"Right now, we are trying to map out what has happened, firstly to protect lives and secondly to be able to push ahead with any kind of rescue that might be necessary," he said, urging citizens to stay calm.

The governor of Chocó, Nubia Carolina Córdoba, said people had been injured and buildings severely damaged in the department's capital of Quibdó.

Crowds of people rushed out into the street in Bogotá still wearing their night clothes upon feeling the tremor, AFP reported.

"The quake was very, very strong," said one content creator, Valeria Polo, 29, in the capital, where only minimal damage was recorded.

Aviation authorities said the airports in Pereira, Manizales, Quibdó, Cartago, Armenia and Buenaventura had sustained damage.

In Pereira, photos and videos published by local media showed pieces of the airport ceiling falling on to travellers who were taking shelter and screaming, and people running through rubble in a panic.

Pereira's mayor, Mauricio Salazar Peláez, told a local radio station that many people were trapped under "a massive quantity of collapsed buildings".

Colombia's geological service said that yesterday's quake had been "the highest magnitude earthquake registered in Colombia in the last decade" and that it had been followed by two 2.8- and 4.8-magnitude aftershocks.

Over the weekend, the US state department had announced the Trump administration planned to provide $1bn (£750m) in security assistance to De la Espriella's government.

De la Espriella, 48, won June's run-off election with promises to crack down on armed groups, shrink the state by as much as 40%, and revive the oil and gas sector.

Messages of support rolled in from leaders across the Americas yesterday, including Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador and El Salvador. Israel also offered its assistance.

The UN deputy spokesperson, Farhan Haq, said: "We stand ready to help as needed."

Colombia's Pacific region around the quake's epicentre lies along the "ring of fire", the line of seismic faults encircling the Pacific Ocean where most earthquakes occur.

Small earthquakes, known as "*temblores*", are common in central and western Colombia, but those above a 6.0 magnitude are rare. In 1999, a 6.2-magnitude quake near the city of Armenia killed more than 1,100 people.

The Colombia earthquake comes weeks after Venezuela was struck by twin earthquakes that devastated the country's northern coast, killing more than 6,000 people.

Additional reporting
Reuters, AFP and AP

'Books shaped me'
New Obama podcast to explore great reads
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Can't see for looking
Rush to find coveted solar eclipse specs
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Step right up The Revel Puck Circus perform in The Wing Scuffle Spectacular - described as a "celebration of fear" - at Underbelly's Circus Hub on the Meadows at the Edinburgh festival fringe yesterday.
PHOTOGRAPH: JANE BARLOW/PA

Mega-dinghy carrying record 230 people crosses the Channel

Diane Taylor

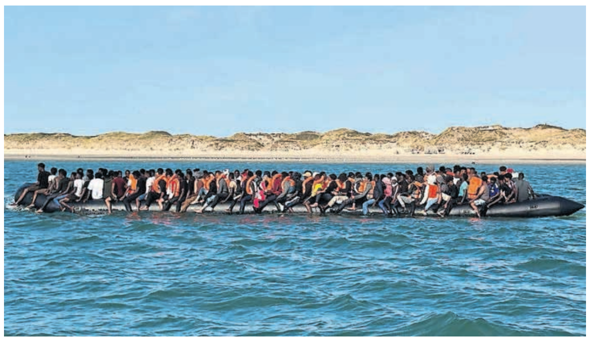
A dinghy carrying a record 230 people arrived in the UK after crossing the Channel in the early hours of yesterday morning.

It is the clearest indication yet that people smugglers in northern France are adapting their business model and escalating their so-called taxi-boat strategy to evade enforcement by British and French authorities.

The development is likely to be a blow to the prime minister and home secretary. Andy Burnham has vowed to be "relentless" and "bring back control", while Shabana Mahmood has said the government is "bearing down" on small boat crossings.

French authorities said before an incident last week, in which a mega-dinghy carrying 173 people capsized after its engine caught fire, there had been nine mega-dinghy crossings of the Channel since 1 January.

Although the number making the crossing this year has fallen by more than 40% compared with the same period last year, the increasing use of larger vessels - and thus reduce the frequency of launches overall by the people smugglers - demonstrates how quickly they have adapted to stronger enforcement by French police on beaches in northern France.



◀ *The boat was the ninth mega-dinghy to cross the Channel this year, in a new tactic by people smugglers to avoid detection*
PHOTOGRAPH: FACEBOOK/STATION SNSM BERCK SUR MER

The British government has struck a deal with Germany to increase seizures of traditional dinghies and engines "upstream".

Last year 106 people were reported to have crossed the Channel in a single dinghy in August and 125 in September. The emergence of mega-dinghies coincided with the announcement in July 2025 of the UK-France "one in, one out" deal, under which a person arriving in the UK from France by small boat can be returned in exchange for another person being brought legally to the UK to claim asylum.

On 12 July this year, a mega-dinghy carrying 128 people arrived in the UK, followed by another carrying 165 people on 23 July. On 4 August, a dinghy carrying 173 people capsized after the engine caught fire. All those onboard are believed to have been rescued.

The use of mega-dinghies poses an even greater risk to life than smaller vessels, which have recently carried an average of between 50 and 60 passengers, according to NGOs working with people crossing the Channel. When small boat crossings began in 2018, only a handful of people typically travelled in each dinghy.

While there have been "green days" this year, when adverse weather has made conditions too dangerous for smugglers to launch dinghies, NGOs say many continue to wait in northern France for an opportunity to cross the Channel. They include some who have been returned to France under the one in, one out scheme and hope to reach the UK for a second time.

Hannah Marwood, the head of legal access at Care4Calais, which provides emergency aid to refugees, said: "Deterrence doesn't stop people seeking safety, it just pushes them towards greater danger and greater exploitation. We've worked with people who were returned to France only to face violence, exploitation and unsafe conditions, leaving them with no option but to risk another dangerous journey.

"Politicians keep promising that another tough policy will solve this but the evidence keeps proving them wrong. If the government is serious about stopping dangerous journeys, it needs to stop recycling failed gimmicks and create safe routes to claim asylum. When people have a safe way to reach protection, they don't have to risk their lives to find it."

The Home Office said: "This latest incident demonstrates the reckless and dangerous tactics employed by the criminal gangs facilitating these crossings, who continue to put lives at risk by cramming ever greater numbers of people on to unseaworthy vessels.

"We are making progress, with the number of small boat crossings down this year and the lowest number recorded for the month of July since 2020. But we must go further, which is why we have signed a payment-by-results deal with the French to put 40% more boots on the ground on French beaches."

Salt Path stars break their silence over source material controversy

PA Media

The Salt Path stars Gillian Anderson and Jason Isaacs have spoken for the first time about the controversy surrounding the film.

An adaptation of Raynor Winn's 2018 memoir, the film was released in the UK last year and told the story of how she and her husband, Moth, walked the South West Coast Path after losing their home.

The memoir also recounted how Moth was diagnosed with a neurological condition. However, the Observer reported last year that Winn may have misrepresented the events that led to the couple losing their home and that experts had doubts over Moth having corticobasal degeneration (CBD). It also revealed that the couple's legal names were Sally and Timothy Walker.

Speaking to the Radio Times, Anderson - who plays Winn - said the reports indicating that claims in the memoir were fabricated "sucked".

She said: "I hope people are able to experience [the film] as its own entity, separate from what may or may not be true or whatever controversy there is."

Last week, Isaacs - who plays Moth - said on the Kermode on Film podcast that he supported the decision to do promotion for the film in the US, where it is being released next month, as it was a "beautiful film" and "much of it is still completely valid". In The Salt Path, the couple lose their house because of a bad business investment.

But the Observer reported that the couple lost their home after an accusation that Winn had stolen thousands of pounds from her employer.

It also said it had spoken to medical experts who were sceptical about Moth having CBD, given his lack of acute symptoms and his apparent ability to reverse them.

In July 2025, Winn posted clinic letters on Instagram addressed to Timothy Walker, which she said showed that "he is treated for CBD/S and has been for many years".

She wrote: "The last few days have been some of the hardest of my life. Heartbreaking accusations that Moth has made up his illness have been made, leaving us devastated."

In a statement on her website, she said the article was "grotesquely unfair, highly misleading and seeks to systematically pick apart my life".

The publishing house Penguin had said it "undertook all the necessary pre-publication due diligence".

PM urged not to exempt PC Harper's killers from early release scheme

Continued *from page 1*

release of Cole and Bowers then every offender with a manslaughter conviction would be affected.

The government plans to release 5,000 prisoners early over a period of 10 months from October to free up places. Harper's killers are due to be released in January.

Burnham is facing demands to exclude Cole and Bowers from the scheme. A petition demanding an intervention has nearly 900,000 signatures.

Despite the Prison Service's concerns and a lack of obvious options, a No 10 source said the prime minister was "still pushing" for a way to keep Harper's killers behind bars.

The prime minister said last week he had "pushed to the very limits of what is possible to do" by exempting 1,000 rapists, child sexual abuse offenders and groomers from early release, which reduced the number of spaces to be freed up in the next 10 months from 6,000.

Blocking the early release of Cole and Bowers could mean delaying the release of at least 500 other offenders convicted of manslaughter, a Whitehall source said.

"People in the Prison Service are terrified by the prospect of another exemption," they said. "They have told the PM that if they carve out manslaughter cases there will have to be another early release scheme before the general election."

Tom Wheatley, the president of the Prison Governors' Association, said ministers had been warned that delays to the early release scheme meant some prisoners could be released at the wrong time.

"We have expressed concerns to Ministry of Justice [MoJ] officials about increased releases in error and unlawful detention risk because of the government's last-minute changes to the Sentencing Act's implementation," he said. "Officials have assured us that ministers have been briefed on the increased risk environment."

Each prison will be expected to re-evaluate the sentences of every prisoner affected by Burnham's changes. This could mean recalculating thousands of prison sentences in a short period of time when staff were on holiday, Wheatley said.

"These late changes come at a time when many staff who specialise in calculating sentences and met the original deadline are off work, on a well-earned break. Because this is a time-pressured and manual process, involving paper files that can be inches thick, it carries an increased risk of error," he added.

Ministers have been advised they are at risk of a legal challenge if they try to carve out exclusions for Cole and Bowers but not others convicted of manslaughter. Nick Hardwick, the former chief inspector of prisons for six years until 2016, said he felt uneasy at the suggestion the government could draw up exemptions to satisfy a public outcry.

"I am appalled by what happened to PC Harper," he said. "But we have to be careful about the principle here. We should be uneasy about politicians deciding what happens to particular offenders. It is something that needs careful debate. It should not be up to politicians to choose how long individuals spend in prison."

MoJ officials said prisons could run out of places in November if the scheme was abandoned.

Asked yesterday whether ministers were accepting the situation as it stood, Burnham's spokesperson said: "I think you've seen from the prime minister's words that he's far from accepting the situation and, as he wrote last week, he wants to go even further. He's pushed hard on what more we could do and his focus now is on fixing the prison system long-term to avoid a repeat of this prison crisis so that it never happens again."

Pressed on whether the prime minister was admitting there was nothing more he could do, the official said: "He understands the public wants him to go further, and he wanted to go further, but on the wider issue … prisons would have run out of space, police would stop making arrests, it would be impossible to lock up convicted offenders and that would put public safety at untold risk."

What can Burnham do to block release?
The PM's options are limited

Why will Andrew Harper's killers be eligible for release?
Under the government's plans to tackle prison overcrowding, via the Sentencing Act, prisoners serving sentences of four years or more for some serious violent or sexual offences will be eligible for release at the halfway point of their term, rather than at two-thirds as had previously been the case. This would apply to Albert Bowers and Jessie Cole, two of Harper's killers, who were jailed for 13 years in 2020 for manslaughter. Henry Long, the main perpetrator, who was jailed for 16 years, will not be subject to early release.

After a public outcry, Burnham excluded rapists, child sexual abusers and groomers from the early release scheme, which he also put back a month to October, but criminals convicted of manslaughter were not excluded.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced mandatory life sentences for offenders convicted of the manslaughter of emergency workers on duty but, as is normal, it does not apply retrospectively.

Why did Burnham not exclude people convicted of manslaughter?
The prime minister initially said he wanted to "go further" with exemptions from the prison release scheme but that it was "not possible without the prison system reaching capacity and collapsing".

There are about 950 people currently in jail for manslaughter. Although not all would be eligible for early release and they would not all be freed simultaneously, every prison space is precious given official predictions suggest the prison system will be full by November without early releases.

Has he changed his mind?
Burnham indicated that more exemptions were not possible because of the need to free up prison space, but anger over Bowers and Cole appears to have prompted a rethink.

However, Burnham's options are limited, with two possibilities being the focus of discussion. The first would be to block the early release of all manslaughter prisoners. The second would be to exempt the killers of emergency workers. Haroon Siddique

Andrew and Lissie Harper. The possible early release of two of his killers, Albert Bowers and Jessie Cole, has caused a public outcry

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK LORD

EXPERT VAPE
EXPERT
ACCESSORIES - BUY BACK - SELL
S - MOBILE PHONES - TABLETS & PCs | E-LIQUID - JUICE - TANKS - ATOMIZERS - STARTER
QUIDS
hes and Tablets
vape & mobile
SALE
SALE
SALE

Betting and vape shops
Councils will have power to block high street openings

Aletha Adu
Alexandra Topping

Councils are to be given powers to stop betting and vape shops taking over their high streets under new plans announced by Andy Burnham.

Local authorities will be able to reject new betting shops and adult gaming centres, while vape shops will be subject to planning permission under plans that could be in place from the start of next year.

Burnham is promising to scrap the "aim to permit" rule in the Gambling Act 2005, which requires councils to essentially allow new gambling premises where applications meet licensing requirements.

This could mark a big shift from reforms introduced by Keir Starmer that gave councils more of an ability to consider the number of gambling premises already in an area back in April, but stopped short of scrapping the "aim to permit rule".

As mayor of Greater Manchester, Burnham had called on Starmer to abolish the rule in January, alongside almost 300 other politicians and campaigners.

Burnham said communities should have much more control over their high streets, where traditional shops, pubs and other services have disappeared. The push fits into his attempt to make the first weeks of his premiership about tangible changes people can see in their everyday lives.

A No 10 source said the government was determined to crack down on vape and betting shops because they were two of the most visible signs of decline on high streets, and local people were genuinely concerned. A fast-tracked consultation on the new measures would take six weeks, with the aim of having the measures in place by the start of

▼ *Vape and betting shops are regarded as two of the most visible signs of decline on high streets*
PHOTOGRAPH: KATY BLACKWOOD/ALAMY

CVP
Candy
American Candy & Drinks
Vapes
Disposable Vapes & Liquids
PHONE
REPAIRS
CANDY
American Candy & Drinks
VAPES
Disposables, E Liquids Snuss, CBD Gummies

2027. "Local people will actually have more of an input into whether or not those shops should open in the first place, giving them a proper say about how their high streets should look," they said.

The move comes after research suggested Labour would be "washed away in a tide of discontent" at the next general election unless it tackles the decline of Britain's high streets.

Prof Will Jennings, who led the University of Southampton research, described the policy as "an important first step". With nearly one in three retail sales in the UK now online, it was clear that the policy would "not solve everything", he said. "But it is speaking to some real area of concern that impacts how people view their local area."

Vape shops currently fall into the same planning category as shops, cafes and even banks, meaning they can open without needing a new planning application. Ministers will consult on putting them into their own planning category so councils will be able to consider each new application individually.

The government is also looking at tightening the definition of what a vape shop is, to prevent people saying they were opening a convenience store that had the primary function of selling vapes, as well as provisions to specifically stop them opening around schools. Angela Rayner said the move addressed problems that had built up over decades. "That's why we're giving local leaders the power to say no to what doesn't belong on their high street, and the tools to fix it themselves," the communities secretary said.

The number of vape shops is not evenly spread, with research from Health Equity North finding the most deprived areas had three times as many as the most affluent.

▲ *Andy Burnham's reforms could be in place by the start of next year*

Burnham said high streets had become "unrecognisable" after decades of decline. "The rise of vape shops, betting shops and rogue operators have replaced the shops, services and community spaces that people are crying out for. That's not on. I said we would improve Britain's high streets, and that's exactly what we are starting to do."

The measures are seen as a "first step" on a wider beautification of Britain's high streets, with Westminster setting clearer expectations for the appearance of shopfronts. Local leaders will be encouraged to look at blueprints for ideal high streets and shown how they can improve the look of their own main shopping areas.

Dawn Butler, the MP for Brent East, who has campaigned on the issue, said: "Government analysis of Gambling Commission data found that B3 [gaming] machines generated an average of £35,000 in gross gambling yield per machine each year.

"That figure really brought home to me the scale of the gambling industry's presence on our high streets and why they would want multiple shops on the high street to maximise their profits."

While you're at it, Andy
Other ways to cut cost of living

Andy Burnham has announced a ban on fake discounts and made it easier to cancel unwanted subscriptions in an attempt to improve life for UK consumers. In the long run, these changes may not make as much difference to your wealth as increasing mandatory contributions on pensions or capping rents, but they will get rid of some day-to-day frustrations. Here are six other things he could fix:

Ban booking fees on tickets

Buying a ticket for an event such as a gig or show doesn't come with as many hidden costs as previously, thanks to consumer protection laws introduced last year. But the fact the fees are clearer does not make them all more palatable.

In the days when you could choose to go to a box office, or between having your tickets posted or emailed, there may have been a justification for some of the add-ons to cover different costs for the promoter, but when there's no choice, it sticks in the throat. Retailers do not charge "transaction" or "order processing fees", so why can they still be slapped on tickets?

Stop direct debit increases when your energy bill is in credit

You pay your bill by direct debit and have been careful with your usage, so at the end of the winter, you are in credit – and then your provider tells you it wants to put up your monthly cost by £50. Of course, a rising price cap might mean you need to increase what you pay, but if you have already got a cushion, why should you hand over more?

According to the regulator Ofgem, providers held a total of £3.2bn of customers' money in the year to March, with the average household £135 in credit. Yet some households on fixed tariffs with large balances are still told that their supplier wants to increase their direct debit. Yes, you can refuse, but the onus is on you as a customer to make the effort. Providers could be banned from raising direct debits by more than the price change, or when customers have built up a surplus that covers a set percentage.

Cut sneaky shrinkflation

We all know prices have been going up and sometimes a smaller pack for the same price is more welcome than having to shell out more, but when the cuts are sneaky that's bad for consumers.

In France and Austria there are rules designed to make it more obvious to shoppers when they are getting less for the same – or sometimes even more – money. Demanding a simple "new pack size" message on products would at least alert people to the change and mean they are making informed decisions.

BLACK SHEEP COFFEE

▲ *Fans at a Wembley gig. Why can so many add-ons be slapped on tickets?*

Force companies to put a phone number on their homepage

You've got a problem and you want to get it sorted – and then you realise you cannot find a number. There are communications companies that have no "contact us" link anywhere to be seen, and energy companies that send you all round the houses looking for a way to get in touch.

One of the recurring themes of Guardian Money readers' problems is the struggle to find someone to help when something goes wrong. Clearly, once you have published a phone number, you need staff at the other end answering the phone and offering some joined-up thinking, so this is only the start of the solution – but at least customers would not feel like companies were trying to hide from them.

Bring forward plans to improve parking

Fines for charging an electric car, debt notices that should never have been sent, fees when you have tried to pay and the app has let you down … Guardian Money has heard from readers encountering all of these things and more when simply entering a car park. The government has promised to sort it out: a code of practice was drawn up years ago but was not introduced, and a new consultation on it ended last September. Plans for a nationwide app that would bring together all the different parking company apps were watered down.

Bringing forward and enforcing the planned code, so that drivers are not receiving bills for parking crimes they did not commit, would leave a welcome gap in the Guardian Money postbag.

Make insurers give you the best deal upfront

A lot has been done to improve renewing your insurance. Insurers are supposed to offer existing customers as good a deal as they do new ones, and your renewal letter tells you how much you paid last year so that you can see if the cost has gone up. And yet the annual dance continues: if you don't call your insurer and query an increase, shop around or threaten to leave, you will probably end up paying more than you need to. **Hilary Osborne**

Millions could face emergency power cuts at short notice in grid shake-up

Jillian Ambrose

Millions of households could face power cuts at short notice under new rules to help the electricity system operator avoid widespread blackouts when energy supplies run low.

The changes, which come into effect this week, will make it easier for the National Energy System Operator (Neso) to call for rotating blackouts at short notice if power supplies are running short.

It is also the first time Neso can use large-scale power cuts to stabilise the grid without the need for emergency government powers.

The system operator for Great Britain could call for enough homes and businesses within a designated area to be disconnected to cut each block's electricity use by more than a fifth with only eight hours' notice, bringing rolling three-hour blackouts across the country to prevent the risk of total power system collapse.

The changes to the grid codes – the technical rules covering the country's transmission system – were quietly approved by the industry regulator late last month. They come only weeks after control room whistleblowers at Neso accused senior leaders of trying to cover up the risk of blackouts during the heatwave.

A spokesperson for Neso said the "last-resort contingency measure" would be used only in "the most extreme and unlikely circumstances" and "after all other available options have been exhausted, helping protect the wider electricity system".

The power cuts would form the last line of defence against more severe and uncontrolled consequences of an electricity system collapse, such as those in Spain and Portugal last summer. In a worst-case scenario this could require five to seven days for electricity to be completely restored.

The new rules bridge the gap between Neso's existing powers to call for short-term power cuts affecting up to a fifth of electricity demand in each area, not used since the miners' strikes in the 1970s, and the government's more wide-reaching emergency powers designed for prolonged electricity disruptions.

In a proposal submitted to the regulator, Neso said the new measures could "be used more flexibly, be initiated quicker" than the government's emergency code, and would be designed for "a shorter duration". This could mean blackouts of up to three hours that would rotate across the country, to limit the impact on homes and businesses while the system operator's control room manages a short-term supply squeeze.

▲ *The aim is to avert mass blackouts when electricity supplies run low*

Meanwhile, a list of protected sites including hospitals, water treatment works and sites of national security interest would be exempt from any planned power cuts.

The government's electricity supply emergency code, which has never been invoked, can be enacted only by the energy secretary. It would initiate rolling blackouts affecting 90% of electricity users to manage a prolonged disruption – such as a large outage at a high-voltage power import cable.

These powers are "not suited for short-notice use", according to Ofgem, but the new protocol could provide the energy system operator with a tool that is similar in scope but that can be initiated "as quickly as possible" to respond to even short-lived supply squeezes – such as a particularly cold winter evening.

The code change underlines the growing risk to the electricity system from short-term power system imbalances, which can be more difficult to predict in advance, rather than large-scale, longer-term outages or disruptions.

A string of other measures can be used to help the system cope with a shortfall of electricity, including disconnecting large industrial users.

Treasury failings had role in staff member's suicide, coroner finds

Helena Horton

▶ *Chloe Moffat, 26, took her own life a day after disciplinary proceedings. She was 'devastated' and convinced that she had lost her job*

PHOTOGRAPH: ANNE MOFFAT

The Treasury "materially contributed" to the death of Chloe Moffat, a personal assistant who took her own life after facing disciplinary proceedings, a coroner has found.

The coroner examining the 26-year-old's death, Anna Crawford, also found there was a risk of future deaths within the civil service from flawed handling of disciplinary proceedings. She said she would send a prevention of future deaths report to the head of the civil service, the Treasury, and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas).

During the Treasury's disciplinary process, Surrey coroner's court heard, Moffat was not reassured that her job was safe even though she was unlikely to be sacked, and she was not allowed a third party of her choice in the meeting. She had her job responsibilities temporarily changed and her access to her manager's diary removed, despite the meeting being described as "informal".

The process left her "devastated" and convinced she had lost her job. The morning after the meeting, Moffat killed herself.

The coroner found that Moffat "appeared well and happy" before the meeting on 19 May last year, and that there were no previous concerns about her mental health. She said: "I am satisfied that the shock and distress of the allegations and thinking she was going to lose her job contributed to her state of mind."

'She was left frightened, isolated and convinced her career had been destroyed'

Anne Moffat
Chloe's mother

The Treasury's human resources policy, which is in line with Acas guidelines, says serious misconduct allegations must be dealt with formally. This is so the person involved is "not deprived of their rights", such as having a third party present in meetings, being given five days' notice, and being informed of the likely outcome if the allegations are found to be true, the coroner said.

Crawford found that, because decisions had already been made to limit Moffat's responsibilities, the allegations "needed a formal process". She said: "I find the meeting was not in accordance with [Treasury] policy", which "makes no provision" for such informal meetings.

During the hearing the head of global issues at the Treasury, who was running the investigation into Moffat, said she did not give Moffat prior notice of the meeting because she "did not want Chloe to worry about it". She had also told the court that when Moffat asked in tears if she would lose her job, she had replied that she could not predict the outcome of any potential investigation.

Earlier in the hearing, when asked if she would have done anything differently, Moffat's line manager told the court: "No, I think we did all we could at the time with the information and advice we were given."

But the coroner found Moffat had been denied safeguards and concern she would lose her job "did materially contribute to her state of mind".

The Treasury previously said it was reviewing its disciplinary process. "This does not set my mind at rest," the coroner said. "I consider there remains a risk of future death."

Anne Moffat, Chloe's mother, said: "The evidence heard during the inquest has reinforced our belief that the allegations made against Chloe were nothing more than workplace gossip. She was treated with a complete lack of empathy with regard to allegations made by colleagues who chose to remain anonymous. We continue to believe that HM Treasury failed in its duty of care towards Chloe. At a time when she needed support, reassurance and fair treatment, she was left frightened, isolated and convinced that her career and reputation had been destroyed."

Moffat suggested the family may take further action: "We will continue to honour her memory and seek the changes needed to ensure that no other family suffers a similar loss."

A Treasury spokesperson said: "Our thoughts remain with [Chloe's] family and friends. We take the coroner's concerns extremely seriously and recognise it is important to act quickly. We are now considering the findings carefully. We have introduced improvements to guidance, support and wellbeing arrangements but recognise we must continue to take action to prevent this happening again."

An Acas spokesperson said: "This is an extremely distressing and upsetting case and our thoughts are with Chloe's family. Acas has a disciplinary and grievance code of practice … We welcome any feedback on the revised code and will consider any recommendations for Acas from the coroner's report."

Samaritans can be contacted on freephone 116 123

Barack Obama to host podcast on books that influenced him

Ella Creamer

Barack Obama is to host a podcast about books that have "profoundly shaped his worldview, from Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison to Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy by John le Carré.

The podcast, called A Great Book with Barack Obama, will launch on Audible on 24 September.

In each of six episodes - produced by the Amazon-owned company in collaboration with the Obamas' production company Higher Ground - the former US president will discuss one of his chosen titles with a guest.

Obama has also selected The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin, All the Pretty Horses by Cormac McCarthy, Gilead by Marilynne Robinson, and All the King's Men by Robert Penn Warren.

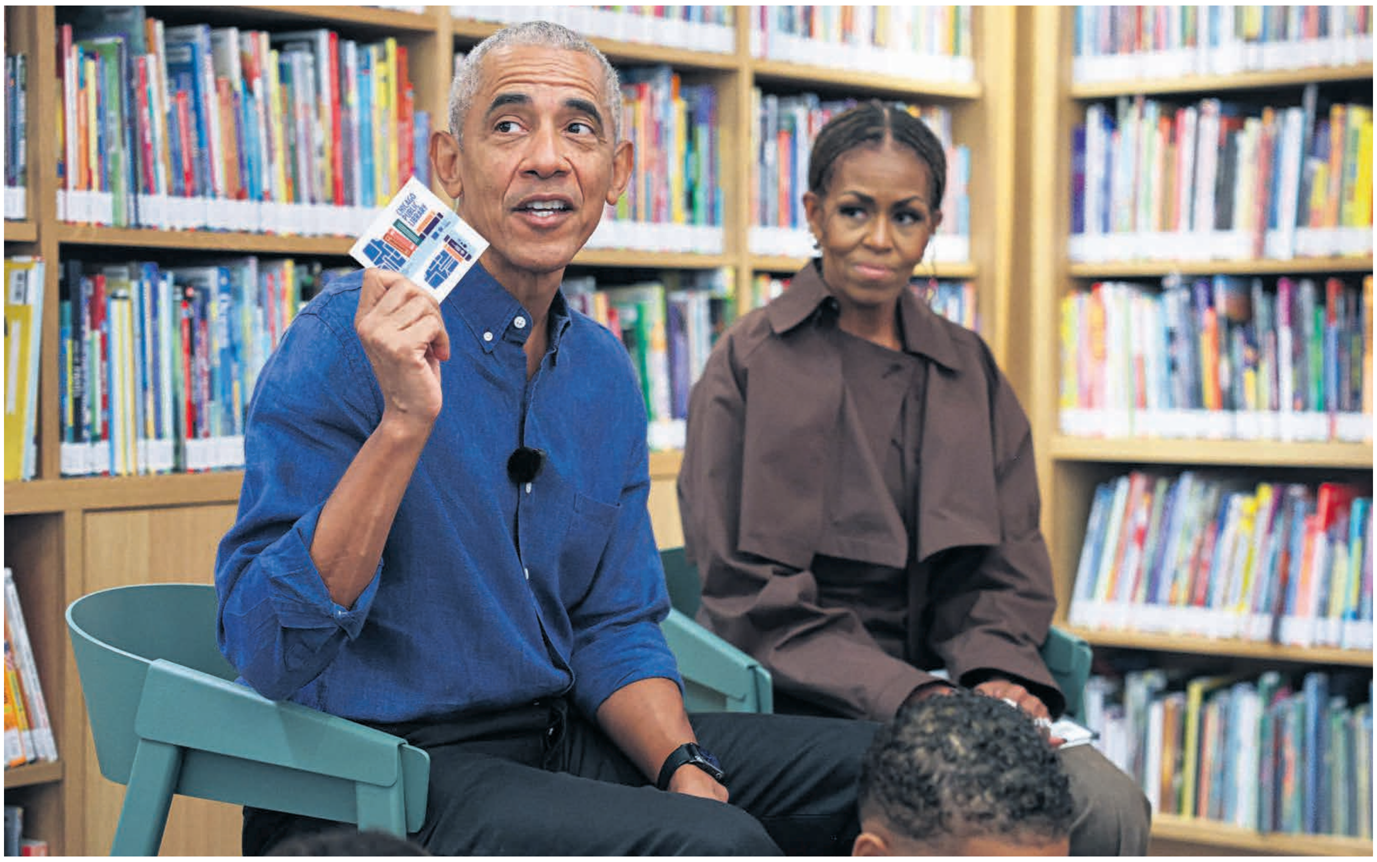
"Great books have always helped me figure out who I am and what I believe," Obama said. "The six books featured in this series have stayed with me throughout my life, and each one has something to teach us about the human experience.

"For this podcast, I invited some friends to explore why they resonate, how they can shape our understanding of ourselves and each other, and why literature matters now more than ever. I hope listeners will be inspired to discover or rediscover books that change the way they see themselves and the world."

The podcast's guests are yet to be announced by Audible.

Obama has publicly shared his favourite books for years, posting summer reading lists and end-of-year roundups. This summer's list, which he published in late July, includes Kin by Tayari Jones, Vigil by George Saunders, The Things We Never Say by Elizabeth Strout, Transcription by Ben Lerner, and Cool Machine by Colson Whitehead.

While his round-ups are often made up of recently published books, all of his picks for the podcast were published in the 20th century except for Robinson's novel Gilead, which was released in 2004. Robinson and Obama struck up a correspondence after he invited her to dinner at the White House, and in 2012 he awarded her the National Humanities Medal.



Song of Solomon
Toni Morrison
AUTHOR OF BELOVED
ALL THE KING'S MEN
BY
Robert Penn Warren

◀ *Barack and Michelle Obama talk to children during a visit to his presidential library in Illinois; above, two of the books featuring in his new podcast*

PHOTOGRAPH: WIN MCNAMEE/ GETTY IMAGES

Woman assaulted after Travelodge staff gave key to her abuser

Helena Horton

Travelodge staff gave a room key to the domestic abuser of a woman, who then physically attacked her.

The woman, who is remaining anonymous, told the BBC she was staying in a branch of the hotel in London to escape the man, but he followed her and was given a key by the reception staff.

She says he kicked in the door, assaulted her and tried to grab her phone. Travelodge has said such instances are "very rare" and customer safety is a priority.

The hotel chain has come under fire for giving men the keys to women's rooms without asking the woman first.

The domestic abuse victim told the BBC that she was staying at the hotel in London in October 2025 for "a night away from the fear" following a period of abuse that had left her "frightened and exhausted".

She said he "told the receptionist that his girlfriend was upstairs having a seizure. He asked what room I was in and what floor I was staying on."

He was then handed a key and shown the way to her room. She said: "I couldn't believe it. The one place I thought he could never get to, he had somehow reached. I felt sick with panic."

MPs have previously written to Travelodge to ask it to review its policies around women's safety.

In a separate incident a man was sentenced in February to more than seven years in jail after lying to Travelodge staff in Maidenhead in 2022 by saying he was the boyfriend of a woman staying there, and being given a key card to her room. Staff did not check with the woman before giving him the card, and he then sexually assaulted her. The victim was later offered what she described as an "insulting" £30 refund.

A Travelodge spokesperson said the company had this year commissioned an independent review led by Paul Greaney KC "to examine our room access security policies and escalation procedures", and had also "made changes to strengthen our room access security policy".

They added: "We are deeply sorry for the significant distress experienced by the customer and we apologise for the way the incident has been handled. Customer safety and security is - and remains - a priority for us. Any case of an unauthorised person entering a guest's room is a significant cause for concern and … this should not have happened - our room access security policies at the time were not correctly followed."

In the UK, call the national domestic abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247, or visit womensaid.org.uk

Banks faces call to reveal details of his surveillance of journalists

Continued *from page 1*

recent months revealing how cash has been given to Reform and Farage personally from donors and wealthy benefactors.

Theo Bamber, the chief executive of the NMA, said aggressive attempts to deter journalistic inquiry were at risk of becoming normalised.

He said: "Using private investigators to try and deter journalists from making legitimate inquiries about public figures is an attack on our democracy. Sadly, intimidation and abuse of local and national journalists is increasingly used as a weapon to limit scrutiny and deflect attention away from matters of public interest. This must not become normalised.

"Ministers must wake up to this threat to our democracy and do much more to protect the independent journalism which underpins our democratic way of life."

According to the New Statesman, Banks instructed Precision Risk and Intelligence, a private investigations company he once owned, to examine Gabriel Pogrund, the editor of the Sunday Times' Insight investigations team. In response to inquiries, Banks told the magazine: "We believe the Sunday Times used hacked information and that was an area of interest. We do have an investigative arm that's got advanced capabilities."

The Sunday Times has strongly rejected Banks's suggestion.

Banks, when asked directly by the New Statesman whether he had paid investigators to look into Pogrund, responded: "When you live by the sword, you die by the sword."

Jemimah Steinfeld, the chief executive of Index on Censorship, said Banks should be open and transparent about the extent of his surveillance of journalists. She said: "I really, really hope that it's not happening to other journalists. But my fear is that it will be, because Gabriel is not the only one who's asking the right questions about Reform. These tactics are often used to just stop the questions, to stop accountability, and that can have hugely detrimental effects on our democratic structure."

▲ *Arron Banks appeared to admit recruiting private investigators*

Reform UK has denied any knowledge of Banks's alleged use of investigators. Gawain Towler, a member of Reform's board and a former head of press for Ukip, said he was uncomfortable with the development but there were legitimate questions as to where journalists were sourcing private information.

"Personally I don't like it," he said. "But truly how in the light of the situation does one ask questions with a possibility of getting an answer …

"The issue with Banks is that there was actually silence about this possible collusion with the [National Crime Agency and journalists] … It would be ridiculous of us not to ask questions. So how do you ask questions?"

Nicky Morgan, a former Conservative secretary of state for culture, media and sport, said such intrusions in press freedom were "not compatible with an open democracy".

She said: "Investigating a journalist can only be intended to have a chilling effect on free speech."

Lisa Smart, the Liberal Democrats' Cabinet Office spokesperson, said: "Hiring private investigators to target journalists simply doing their jobs is a desperate attempt to dodge accountability. Anyone who uses or condones these tactics demonstrates contempt for a free press and should have no business in British public life."

Banks, who helped run the pro-Brexit campaign group Leave.EU, is reported to have previously hired what he described as "ex-MI5 and SAS" operatives to surveil political opponents before the EU referendum.

Briton, 78, ordered to leave Sweden after 21 years

Lisa O'Carroll
Senior correspondent

Joyce Thomas said to be kicked out of Sweden, where her son and grandchildren live, was 'horrible'
PHOTOGRAPH: HELENA KARLSSON/NWT

A British widow who has lived in Sweden for 21 years is fighting deportation from the country after the authorities told her a post-Brexit application to stay had been submitted too late.

Joyce Thomas, 78, is the latest of 2,500 Britons ordered to leave Sweden after Brexit in what campaigners and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) have said is an inexplicably hardline approach by the authorities. In 2023 Sweden threatened to deport a British woman with dementia in a care home shortly before she died.

Thomas, a retired nurse, was given four weeks to leave Sweden in November, three years after her husband had died, causing huge distress.

After being widowed, she moved with her dog to a flat in Hammarö, close to her son and grandchildren and to her husband's grave.

"It is unbelievable at my age to be chucked out after being in a country for so long, when you've done absolutely nothing wrong," Thomas said. "I have no criminal record, no driving penalties, nothing. And I have lived here on my own financial means. I just think nobody has actually looked into this thing. I mean, if it was their family or mother, they wouldn't like them to be in this situation."

Holding back tears, she said: "I am not young, and the idea I would have to come back and forth to visit my son and grandchildren and to visit my husband's grave here … it is just horrible when you sit and digest it all."

Her husband, Gwynne, died in 2023 of cancer. It was on a trip back from the UK in 2022, when they visited their second son in Brighton, that they learned they should have formally applied to stay in Sweden after Brexit.

Thomas with her late husband, Gwynne, who died three years ago

Thomas said her husband had been meticulous at keeping up with news relevant to British people in Sweden and had taken responsibility for all the administration in their household. She was sure he would have made the application had he known about it.

While late applications are permissible under the UK's withdrawal agreement with the EU, Thomas's submission was rejected in 2024 because she could not demonstrate reasonable grounds for applying late.

A subsequent application to stay under national immigration laws was also rejected. With the help of lawyers working pro bono, she is now taking the case to a higher court.

"When Gwynne died it was the worst thing," she said. "We were married for 55 years; he was my best friend and meant everything to me after all those years. But, you know, it [his death] was an end. This is just unbearable limbo. It is horrible. I am not young. I have already moved from a house to a flat - and to start moving again and looking for another place? I will be dead by the time I would be settled."

Peter Kyle, the MP for Hove and Portslade, said the case was "deeply concerning". He added: "While immigration decisions in Sweden are a matter for the Swedish authorities, I have consistently believed that the rights of UK nationals who exercised free movement rights before Brexit should be treated fairly and with compassion."

He urged Sweden to review Thomas's case. "I hope the authorities will carefully consider all the circumstances of Mrs Thomas's case, including her long residence in Sweden, her family connections and the humanitarian factors involved."

The FCDO has also expressed concern about Thomas and the wider hardline approach taken by Sweden to British people living in the country since before Brexit.

Data shows that Sweden has the highest number of Brexit-related deportations of Britons of all EU member states. According to Eurostat data, 2,500 British nationals have been ordered to leave the country since Brexit, one-third of the number of removal orders issued across the 27-member bloc since Brexit in 2021.

The FCDO said: "We regularly raise concerns regarding Sweden's protection of citizens' rights with both the Swedish authorities and the European Commission, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation and application of citizens' rights matters in EU member states."

Article 18 of the EU-UK withdrawal agreement allows for late applications on reasonable grounds. But UK government sources said they believed Sweden was "taking a considerably stricter approach" than others. The result was that "in practice individuals are not likely to have their reasonable grounds accepted".

According to the European Commission, almost 4,000 applicants for post-Brexit residency status in Sweden were refused, out of 14,200 made. By contrast, Bulgaria, which has a similar number of applicants at about 16,000, refused five people, and Belgium, which had 13,000 applicants, refused 605.

According to the FCDO, Sweden's refusal rate of 27.5% is three times higher than any other member state and considerably higher than the EU average of between 3% and 4%.

The Swedish immigration authority, Migrationsverket, said: "In exceptional circumstances, it is still possible to submit a late application. The applicant must explain in writing why they were unable to apply within the prescribed period. Simply stating that the person was unaware of the requirement to apply is not, in itself, considered a sufficient explanation."

The withdrawal agreement also calls for "proportionality" in any decisions to remove residency rights.

Felix Andler, a doctor and friend of the Thomas family who is supporting Thomas, said: "We think the proportionality is really hard to see here: that somebody's life can be upended, simply because they missed a deadline to fill out a form with no information communicated at all to them."

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◀ *People in New York using protective eyewear to observe the total solar eclipse of 8 April 2024*

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN LAMPARSKI/GETTY

Last-minute rush for protective glasses on eve of solar eclipse

Steven Morris

A frantic rush is on across the UK to find the right kind of protective eyewear before tomorrow's partial solar eclipse.

High street stores are running out of eclipse glasses, and online shoppers who track down a pair are being told they may not get hold of them until the end of the week. In other words, in plenty of time for the next comparable UK eclipse – in 2081 – but no good at all for tomorrow's show.

The Royal Observatory Greenwich said it was aware of a shortage of glasses. A spokesperson said: "We have sold out of solar eclipse glasses, both online and in our shops, due to an unprecedented volume of orders."

Ordinary sunglasses are not safe to use and over the past few weeks consumer experts have been recommending specialised glasses.

But try to get, for example, a pack of Lunt solar eclipse glasses (£14.99) on Amazon and the dispiriting message "free delivery Thursday 13 August" pops up.

The Robert Dyas store was offering Bresser eclipse glasses for £2.99, but there was an "out of stock" message on its website.

Emma, from Tonbridge in Kent, described her mission to find pairs for herself and three relatives. "They were sold out everywhere," she said.

When she called her local opticians, she received short shrift.

"They sounded really angry. I said: 'I'm calling to see if you have any glasses for the …' The assistant interrupted and said no and hung up." Emma managed to get one pair from a friend whose forward-thinking mum had bought a multipack. "If we can't get any more, we'll have to share," she said.

Neill Sanders, the founder of Go Stargazing and the UK coordinator of Astronomers Without Borders, said there was not a shortage – it was just that people had not planned ahead.

He said: "I'm getting loads of calls, text messages, emails with people asking: 'Do you have some glasses?' Everyone's suddenly realising we need glasses for Wednesday."

Sanders said he had imported 300,000 pairs of solar eclipse glasses from the US.

He had sent out 100,000 pairs over the past few weeks at discount prices to astronomy clubs and community groups but it was now too late to get most of the others out.

Another distributor said: "We have good stocks. Our issue is everybody has left it until the last minute to order and we only have so many people we can put into packing."

Jake Foster, an astronomer at the Royal Observatory Greenwich, said: "If you don't have a pair of eclipse glasses, you can still view the eclipse indirectly.

"Any household item with small round holes in it, such as a colander or even a piece of paper with a small hole poked in it can project an image of the eclipse on to a flat surface.

"Don't look at the sun itself but instead at the shadow that's being produced. You should be able to see the shape of the eclipse within it."

After the 1999 total solar eclipse, the Royal College of Ophthalmologists reported about 70 cases of people experiencing vision problems from watching it.

The UK Health Security Agency and the royal college have issued detailed advice on their websites on the sort of glasses that are safe and on other ways of watching the eclipse.

Britons asked to cut back on power use as the sky dims

Jillian Ambrose

The UK's biggest household energy supplier is asking customers to use less electricity during the solar eclipse.

Octopus Energy has urged households to avoid running washing machines and dishwashers between 6pm and 8pm tomorrow, as the moon is expected to block up to 95% of the sun over parts of the country.

The eclipse is expected to knock out the last of Great Britain's solar power generation for the day, at the same time as the fifth heatwave of the year is likely to increase demand for electricity to run air conditioning, fans and refrigeration systems.

In return for avoiding unnecessary electricity use during the eclipse, the supplier is offering customers a free hour of electricity next weekend. The offer is open to Octopus customers who are signed up to take part in the supplier's "saving sessions", when households earn rewards for using more electricity when renewables are abundant, or less when wind and solar power are scarce.

Octopus believes that, if enough households delay using electricity for a short time during the eclipse, it could reduce the need for Great Britain's electricity system operator to fire up extra gas-fired stations to replace the lost solar power.

The National Energy System Operator (Neso), which is responsible for running Great Britain's electricity system, said it had been "planning for over a year" to manage the effects of the eclipse, "one of the most unusual evenings our control room will manage this year".

Neso expects the early evening peak in electricity demand to occur later than usual as millions head outdoors to see the eclipse before going home to cook, clean and watch TV.

The heatwave in June forced Neso to issue its first-ever warning notice for electricity supplies during a summer period.

Moon shadow When the sun's light will be blocked and how to view it safely

Tomorrow evening, millions of Europeans will experience a celestial treat: a solar eclipse. The light of the setting sun will be virtually blocked out across much of western Europe, including the UK, France, Belgium, Switzerland and northern Italy.

What is a solar eclipse?

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the Earth and the sun, meaning the moon casts a shadow on the Earth.

Viewers see a total solar eclipse when the sun's light is fully blocked by the moon – meaning they are in the umbra of the moon's shadow – and a partial solar eclipse when only part of the light is blocked, meaning they are in the penumbra of the moon's shadow.

Whether viewers see a total or partial eclipse – or, indeed, no eclipse at all – depends on where they are. "You have to be right in the middle of the shadow to see a total eclipse, and that is quite a narrow track on the Earth's surface," said Dr Megan Argo, a reader in astrophysics at the University of Lancashire.

How rare is tomorrow's event?

The last event of this kind visible from the UK occurred in 1999, when parts of Devon and Cornwall were in the path of totality.

While the country will experience only a partial solar eclipse tomorrow, experts are enthusiastic, noting the next comparable event visible in the UK will be in 2081.

When will it take place?

For those watching in Spain under the path of the total eclipse, it will peak between 8.26pm and 8.33pm local time, depending on location, shortly before sunset.

In the UK, the Royal Observatory Greenwich calculates the partial eclipse will begin for viewers in London at 6.17pm, before reaching its maximum at 7.13pm and ending at 8.06pm. Dr Carys Herbert, an astronomer at Royal Observatory Greenwich, said people in Cornwall would experience about 96% coverage, in the west of Scotland 93%, and in London 92%.

▲ *A partial solar eclipse as seen from Oxfordshire on 20 March 2015*

How can I view the eclipse safely?

Experts have stressed it is crucial not to look at the sun with the naked eye, or to rely on sunglasses, noting it can cause permanent eye damage. Instead, they recommend buying special eclipse glasses.

"If you don't have eclipse glasses, you can use a colander or something to create a pinhole projector," said Herbert. This is a way to see the eclipse indirectly – do not look at the sun through the colander but project the light on to card or paper.

LANGMEAD HOUSE

Anger at landlord as hundreds of residents left without regular water for six months

Nimra Shahid
Damien Gayle

Hundreds of residents on an east London estate have been without regular running water for more than six months while their landlord delayed works to fix the problem.

Taps have been running dry in Tower Hamlets, where residents have been forced to use bottled water after development in the area may have left it without an adequate supply.

Hundreds of families in Devons Road estate, whose landlord is the housing association Poplar Harca, have been unable to properly cook, clean, wash or even flush their toilets.

Residents, who are bracing for a fifth heatwave this week, say they are still in the dark about why their water suddenly stopped – although some suspect it is because of new housing developments built nearby.

"I'm appalled at the situation my constituents find themselves in," said Uma Kumaran, the area's Labour MP. "Access to water is a basic right, yet residents of Devons Road estate have been denied that right for far too long.

"It's a gross failure of one of the most fundamental duties a landlord owes to their tenants – especially during record-breaking heatwaves.

"I have repeatedly pushed Poplar Harca to take urgent action, full accountability, and set out a clear and swift timetable for repairs, for all buildings. Residents deserve nothing less than an urgent and permanent fix."

Poplar Harca acknowledged that "pressure levels can fluctuate" but denied the water supply had ever stopped completely.

Residents said they first began experiencing water shortages last summer. By December, the problems had become widespread, with at least nine blocks affected.

In correspondence with residents, seen by the Guardian, Poplar Harca initially claimed the problem lay with the water supplier. The housing association said Thames Water was supplying "lower flow pressures than in previous years".

But at the same time, Poplar Harca was also telling other residents that "extensive works" were needed to create a new pump room in their block to increase water pressure. The landlord said these works could not begin until a formal process – called section 20 – was carried out to determine what share of the cost should be borne by leaseholders.

In common with social housing blocks around the UK, some flats have been purchased by their residents under the right to buy. When major works are planned the freeholder must carry out a consultation to determine how much leaseholders should contribute.

Poplar Harca suggested there was no need for emergency action from a judge but a property solicitor the Guardian spoke to said that may not be the case.

Clair Phillips, a senior associate at the law firm Moore Barlow, said: "In circumstances where works are urgent, such as a prolonged loss of water supply, one would ordinarily expect the landlord to undertake the necessary works without delay and then apply to the first-tier tribunal for [urgent] dispensation from the section 20 consultation requirements."

In the meantime, Poplar Harca told residents – including families and those classed as vulnerable – to access public shower facilities at Poplar Baths and by expensing day passes at Mile End leisure centre.

Residents, many of whom are parents with young children, or are elderly or disabled, said this was not an acceptable solution.

▲ *One of the affected blocks on the Devons Road estate in Tower Hamlets, east London; below, Abdul Hai, with his son Abdullah, are among hundreds of residents left without regular running water for more than six months while Poplar Harca delayed works to restore water pressure*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALICIA CANTER/ THE GUARDIAN

‘This is a first-world country’ The families unable to clean, cook or flush the toilet

Christmas day in east London. Beatrice Asante empties a bag of potatoes into her kitchen sink and turns on the tap. Nothing. She turns it off and on again. Still nothing. What now?

Asante rushes out to the only shop that is open, the local convenience store. She buys several big plastic bottles of water. Enough, she thinks, to make dinner and to last until the taps start running again.

Seven months later, and as parts of the country brace for a fifth heatwave, Asante still cannot rely on tap water.

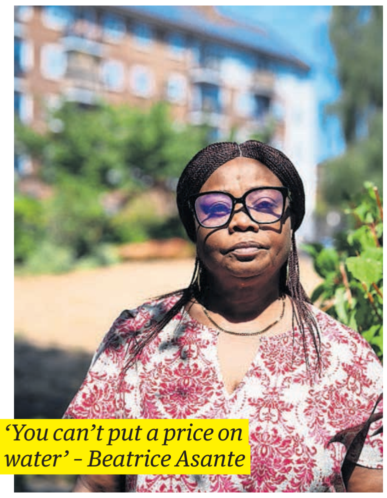
She is one of hundreds of householders in housing association flats on the Devons Road estate in Tower Hamlets who have been left for up to a year without a reliable supply. Only now, after months of delay, is the landlord mobilising to have the problem repaired.

It is difficult to understand just how much we rely on running water - until it is taken away. Residents of the nine blocks affected have been left unable to properly wash themselves, clean their homes or cook. For long stretches each day, they cannot even flush their toilets.

Rajia Begum and Jasmine Begum are two mothers raising their families in east London. Both have been without a reliable supply of water this year.

They often only get running water in the middle of the night.

“Everything [we] do is after one o’clock at night,” Rajia said. “We can’t sleep. [Instead] we do cooking, washing, toilet, everything.”


‘You can’t put a price on water’ - Beatrice Asante

In July, she went three days without any water. Her landlord, Poplar Harca, sent three five-litre bottles. But when one toilet flush requires five litres, 15 litres is not enough to keep a household going. “We can’t clean,” she said. “It’s a messy house. Because without water how can it be possible?”

Trying to raise children without a reliable supply of water presents particular problems.

Rajia says her two daughters refuse to use the toilet at home because it is unclear when it can be flushed. As a result, they have become unwell.

Many residents of these estates are in poverty, or are affected by disability.

For many, English is their second, or even third language. They are among the most marginalised people in the capital.

But it seems remarkable that so many can have gone without water for so long without action taken.

The first time Poplar Harca came to deliver water to Razna Begum’s home after she made a number of attempts to get through to their phone line, the landlord came to check her taps turned on.

“We are not lying, what would we do for our taps to turn on? We’ve had no water for the last eight months,” she said.

The 64-year-old lives on the Devons Road estate with her youngest son, who has severe eczema, and her husband, Abdul Hai, who had a stroke in June and is bedbound. Razna believes he can no longer use his right side because of the stress from being without water for more than eight months. His visiting carers have advised that he should stay hydrated.

“We have emailed our Tower Hamlets mayor but no one has replied. They have stayed silent,” she added. “This is a first-world country but there is no water.”

A spokesperson for Tower Hamlets council said: “Although the delivery and maintenance of water services within these buildings is a matter for the landlord, Poplar Harca, the council and the mayor’s office are working with them throughout to escalate residents’ concerns, seek updates on remedial works, and ensure appropriate support arrangements are in place, including provisions for vulnerable residents and access to bottled water where required.”

Nimra Shahid and Damien Gayle

As a landlord, Poplar Harca was obliged to provide water to its tenants whose taps had run dry. Residents said they often ended up waiting on its phone line for more than an hour at a time, often not getting through at all on weekends or during last month’s unprecedented heatwaves.

When they did get through, deliveries were limited to 15 litres per household, regardless of how many people lived there. Some residents said they received their first delivery only last week - more than eight months after the shortages began.

Residents suspect their water has been diverted to new developments in their neighbourhood. Water shortages began for many last autumn, around the time of the completion of Stroudley Walk, a Poplar Harca commercial housing development.

Water engineers were divided on the cause. Paul Kent of Kent Group Services said Thames Water’s “infrastructure is still decades and centuries old, with lots of leaks on the systems due to the number of new housing developments in east London. Thames Water has had to lower water pressure to be able to supply everyone.”

Dale Joseph, a gas and plumbing engineer with Under Pressure Plumbing London, visited some of the affected blocks with the Guardian. He said that given Thames Water said it was meeting its responsibility to provide adequate pressure to the properties, it was up to the landlord to ensure each flat had enough to keep the taps flowing.

Poplar Harca recently told some residents they could expect the issue to be fixed in six blocks between 5 August and 8 September. Work at three blocks is not due to begin until 27 August. That means some residents will have been left without adequate water for up to a year.

A Thames Water spokesperson said that after investigating a number of complaints, it believed the low pressure was “due to extensive new development in the area, as well as some problems related to customers’ internal plumbing”. They said: “We are looking into remodelling the wider area, which could raise the water pressure to take account for increased localised development. This requires extensive testing and any plans are at a very early stage.”

Sadaf Moosvi, an organiser with the community organisation Acorn, who helped some residents to come together to make a complaint, said: “There are genuinely no words to describe the scale of this scandal. I’ve been organising communities for several years and have seen a great deal, but never anything like this.”

> *‘It’s a gross failure of one of the most fundamental duties of a landlord’*
>
> **Uma Kumaran**
> *Local MP*

A Poplar Harca spokesperson said: “Residents continue to receive water, although pressure levels can fluctuate and, at times, may be insufficient for some households’ needs.

“As soon as we became aware of the issue in December, we worked with Thames Water to investigate the cause who confirmed pressure to the affected buildings remains above the minimum level required under Ofwat’s guaranteed standards scheme.

“The permanent solution requires the installation of new pump systems in the affected buildings. While we were keen to move forward as quickly as possible, because the water supply has remained available, albeit with temporary interruptions, we did not need to pursue an emergency route to fit the pumps. As a result, we’ve followed the statutory section 20 consultation process with leaseholders before major works can proceed.”

They added: “We appreciate that residents would have liked a faster resolution. Our focus has been on maintaining support for affected residents … while progressing the permanent solution as quickly as the statutory process and technical works allow.”

Thames Water

Company makes ‘indefensible’ £1m payout to finance chief

Jasper Jolly

Thames Water has paid its finance chief a £1m signing fee despite teetering on the brink of a government-handled administration, in a decision that the environment department labelled “unacceptable”.

The utility company revealed that it made the payment last month, in a letter sent last week by Adrian Montague, its chair, to MPs on the environment, food and rural affairs select committee.

Thames is one of at least eight water companies banned from paying performance-related bonuses because of continued environmental failings. The company, which provides services to 16 million customers in London and the Thames valley, has been on the verge of collapse for more than two years.

Andy Burnham has previously indicated the government should take control of Thames in order to write off debts worth billions of pounds. However, the creditors who in effect control Thames have spent months negotiating to take formal ownership, if regulators will give leniency on future fines. The creditors have offered the government a “golden share” in the business in a last-ditch attempt to avoid having their debts written down.

Yet the continued payments of millions of pounds to executives will probably strengthen calls for the government to take formal control via a special administration regime.

> **£4.1m**
> *The total bonuses Thames Water paid its senior managers in the financial year ending March 2026*

A spokesperson for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said: “It is unacceptable that one of the worst-performing water companies is handing out huge payments to its executives when it should be focusing on improving performance and rebuilding public trust.

“We’ve banned bonuses for polluting water bosses and expect companies to follow both the letter and the spirit of the rules. We look forward to the outcome of [the industry regulator] Ofwat’s review, which will assess if and how these rules should be strengthened.”

The payment to Steve Buck was made last month, after Thames took legal advice over its obligations. It was drawn from a £3bn emergency debt package agreed last year with creditors. That money is designed to keep Thames running while it tries to negotiate a longer-term takeover by its creditors.

River Action’s head of campaigns, Amy Fairman, said: “Thames Water is on the brink of financial collapse with a debt pile of £20bn, rivers in their region are drowning in sewage and 571m litres of water are lost every day. Yet there’s still £1m for a finance chief’s signing-on payment when over a quarter of Thames Water customer bills go to servicing debt.

“Meanwhile, frontline staff are out around the clock holding this failing company together. It’s indefensible. Put Thames Water into special administration and rebuild it to serve its customers and clean up our rivers, not reward failure.”

The payment to Buck, first reported by Sky News, was deferred from April 2025, when he joined from Pennon Group, the owner of South West Water.

The payment would come on top of total pay for Buck of £591,000 in the financial year to 31 March. That included a £491,000 base salary, as well as a £25,000 discretionary payment to “support his appointment and facilitate his timely onboarding, recognising costs incurred in connection with his recruitment”. However, the extra £1m payment was not detailed in its annual report, released last month.

Buck’s base salary was also increased to £630,000 in April. The total pay of the chief executive, Chris Weston, for the year to 31 March rose to £1.2m.

Thames last month disclosed it had paid £4.1m in bonuses for senior managers.

Thames Water and the creditor group declined to comment. The environment committee was approached for comment.

Outage closes resort

Chessington World of Adventures Resort theme park was forced to close yesterday owing to a water outage affecting the local area.

The Surrey attraction said it was working closely with Thames Water and local partners to support a “safe and timely resolution”.

Those affected were told that tickets would be automatically be revalidated for future dates.

A Thames Water spokesperson said: “We’re sorry to customers in the Chessington area who are currently without water, and to anyone whose plans to visit Chessington World of Adventures Resort have been affected following today’s outage. Our specialist team is on site and have located a burst water main on Leatherhead Road. Repairs are under way.” Caroline Davies

PAW PATROL THE DINO MOVIE
There were no adventures at Chessington yesterday

Berger urges Tory leader to reverse offer of role to former neo-Nazi

Aletha Adu

Luciana Berger has urged Kemi Badenoch to "listen to victims" and reverse her decision to give a national advisory role to a former neo-Nazi.

Joshua Bonehill-Paine was jailed in 2015 for more than three years after posting antisemitic material online before a planned neo-Nazi rally. In 2016, he was found guilty of racially aggravated harassment for abuse directed at Berger, an MP at the time. He was also the founder and leader of the National British Resistance, a far-right group.

The Labour peer said she was still affected by his crimes more than nine years later and questioned what safeguarding checks Badenoch and the Conservative party had carried out in relation to his new appointment to the party's culture and integration commission.

Berger asked whether Bonehill-Paine's new role could bring him to Westminster, as she wrote on X: "Can I expect to come face to face with him on the parliamentary estate?"

Badenoch's spokesperson said he will not have a parliamentary pass and would not be on the estate.

Her intervention came after the Conservative party leader published a lengthy defence of Bonehill-Paine in the Times, describing questions over his suitability to stand as a councillor in Somerset as a "pile-on".

Bonehill-Paine was set to stand as a Conservative councillor but announced last week that he had withdrawn from next year's local elections after Badenoch offered him the advisory role. Badenoch said: "People need to understand that the Conservative party under my leadership is now the party of personal responsibility and law and order. That means insisting on consequences by punishing wrongdoing and protecting the public, especially victims.

"We need fewer double standards and instead higher standards in a system that is repeatedly failing to protect the public. We should be tough enough to stand by our beliefs even when politically inconvenient, wise enough to recognise rehabilitation and consistent enough to apply the same principles to friend and foe."

Berger said she had seen the piece late on Saturday night and "tried to ignore it" but after Badenoch shared the article on Monday, the former MP for Liverpool Wavertree accused her of giving insufficient consideration to Bonehill-Paine's victims.

"Badenoch makes one passing reference to the 'victims'," Berger wrote. "There were many. And I was one of them. Did Badenoch read the judge's sentencing remarks? In court we heard the victim impact statements from people unable to testify, whose lives he had destroyed."

"His appointment as an adviser … could conceivably bring him to Westminster. Can I expect to come face to face with him on the parliamentary estate?" she added. "It's still not too late for Badenoch to listen to victims and reverse her decision."

A spokesperson for Badeenoch said Bonehill-Paine had served his time, completed Home Office Prevent courses, and been into schools to teach about combatting antisemitism and extremism. But the party did not answer questions about what safeguarding checks it had carried out in relation to his appointment, or why Badenoch had not contacted Berger.

The abuse Bonehill-Paine directed at Berger included calling her a "rodent" and an "evil money-grabber". He also has a conviction for assaulting a police officer and burglary of a police station, and was convicted in 2014 of malicious communications over an anti-Islam hoax that led to death threats against the owners of a pub in Leicester.

Berger challenged Badenoch over what consideration had been given to safeguarding adding: "Badenoch's article says she wants to safeguard the public and victims, but what safeguarding checks has she and the Conservative party carried out?"

If Badenoch or her team had contacted her, Berger said, "I would say, I don't think it is 'harder politics' for this man to be part of Kemi's operation. I think it's the wrong politics."

She added: "I'm all for rehabilitation. But someone convicted of neo-Nazi misogynistic crimes is not suitable for public office less than a decade after his conviction. And neither should he be gifted a national advisory role, even closer to power."

▲ *Luciana Berger said Kemi Badenoch should 'listen to victims'*

▼ *Lucy Harrison, pictured with her mother, Jane Coates, in December 2024, just days before she was shot dead by her father in Texas*

Mother of Briton fatally shot by father in Texas calls for renewed investigation

Josh Halliday
North of England editor

The UK foreign secretary, Ed Miliband, is being urged to push US authorities to reopen an investigation into a man who shot dead his British daughter while she was visiting him in Texas.

Lucy Harrison, 23, from Warrington in Cheshire, was fatally shot on 10 January 2025, the day before she was due to fly home to the UK.

Her father, Kris Harrison, who admitted holding the pistol at the time, has never been arrested.

A Texas grand jury decided not to prosecute the telecoms executive, originally from Liverpool, last year after what Lucy's family described as an "inadequate" police investigation.

Earlier this year, the senior coroner for Cheshire ruled that Lucy had been unlawfully killed and that Harrison's actions amounted to gross negligence manslaughter.

Lucy's mother, Jane Coates, yesterday wrote to Miliband urging him to press the US authorities to reopen the investigation into her former husband, in light of the coroner's findings.

She wrote: "I understand that the British government cannot interfere in the American justice system or direct US prosecutors to take a particular course of action.

"However, the Foreign Office can use appropriate diplomatic channels to draw attention to the coroner's conclusion, raise the serious concerns surrounding the original investigation and ask the relevant US authorities to review the case."

A number of UK politicians, including the former justice secretary Robert Buckland, are also urging Miliband to intervene.

Harrison, a telecoms executive, had bought a pistol for $500 (£370) from a colleague two years before Lucy's death. Gun owners over the age of 21 are not required to obtain training or a licence in Texas, one of the most firearms-friendly US states.

An inquest in Cheshire was told that Lucy had expressed concern to friends about her two younger siblings being in the house with the Glock 9mm semi-automatic pistol.

It also heard that the pair had an argument about Donald Trump in the hours before the fatal shooting, although Lucy's family say this is not why she was shot.

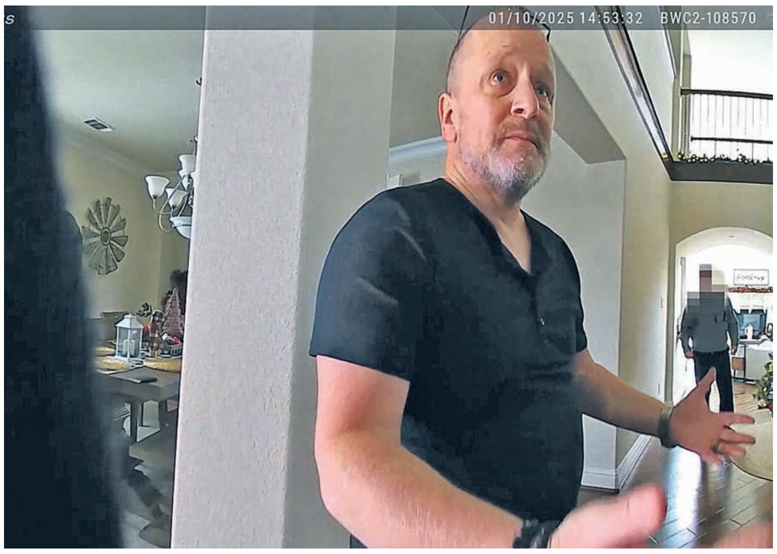
Despite an officer smelling alcohol on Harrison's breath, he was not breathalysed. During his police interview, a Texas ranger explained to Harrison that the "gun would only discharge if the trigger was pressed", according to a report released to the UK inquest. "Kris said 'OK'," it noted. Yet authorities said they were unable to arrest Harrison because they could not prove intent.

Sarah Hall, the Labour MP for Warrington South, said the Foreign Office should also address why the family was not given "adequate support" from the UK government after Lucy's death.

In her letter to Miliband, Coates said: "I must also express my disappointment at the response we received from the previous administration. There was no meaningful action to help us seek justice.

"The formation of the new government under Andy Burnham has given us renewed hope. We have been struck by the prime minister's determined tone, and by his emphasis on taking action and getting things done. We sincerely hope that this approach will extend to Lucy's case."

A Foreign Office spokesperson said: "Our thoughts remain with Jane and her family for the tragic loss they have suffered, and we will always look to learn lessons from cases such as this one to improve the consular support we offer to other families in the future."



▲ *Bodycam footage shows Kris Harrison, originally from Liverpool, telling police he shot his daughter Lucy. He has never been arrested*

GB News investigated as guest links Pride to paedophilia on air

Michael Savage
Media editor

GB News is being investigated by the media regulator after a guest appeared to link Pride parades with bestiality and paedophilia.

The remarks are thought to have set a new record for individual complaints about a GB News programme, with more than 12,000 people raising concerns about comments made by the guest Caroline Farrow.

Those to speak out included the Green party leader, Zack Polanski, and Bimini, a former contestant on RuPaul's Drag Race UK.

Farrow, who describes herself as a Catholic commentator and is a campaigns manager for the ultra-conservative advocacy group CitizenGO, made the remarks during a discussion after the London Pride march last month.

Speaking on the Alex Armstrong Tonight show, Farrow said the march was "not about gay rights" and had instead "become about celebrating every single sexuality that isn't heterosexuality".

She said this included "some very bizarre and unhealthy kinks and quirks, you know, like furries and bestiality and even minor-attracted, they call themselves minor-attracted people, you know, paedophiles".

It prompted an open letter signed by Polanski and Bimini, which called on Ofcom to deal with the "dangerous" disinformation.

Ofcom confirmed it was investigating the show in relation to broadcasting standards. The rules say that "material which may cause offence is justified by the context".

The edition of the show, including the remarks, has been removed from YouTube.

Armstrong, the show's presenter, did provide some push back to the comments at the time, saying: "The overwhelming amount of people at Pride were there for good reasons." He said: "I don't think it was full of paedophiles and everything, I'm sure there are nefarious people."

He used a later show to go further, stating: "Comments made by guests last weekend conflated gay Pride with the celebration of paedophilia. This is an age-old gay trope that's been used over a number of years to demonise and slander gay people.

"Those comments by guests had no place in that discussion."

The Green party deputy leader Rachel Millward welcomed Ofcom's decision to investigate.

"The suggestion that gay people are somehow a particular threat to children is baseless, irresponsible and deeply harmful," she said.

"GB News is a regulated broadcaster, and broadcasters are supposed to meet basic professional standards. That should include not using their platform to spread hateful lies about a marginalised group."

GB News was approached for comment. At the time, it said in a statement: "These comments were expressed within a live debate by a contributor. They were her own views, and do not reflect the views or editorial position of GB News. Anyone watching the debate would have noted the comments were robustly and repeatedly challenged by two other contributors."

GB News has already been criticised by Ofcom for similar remarks on a different show. Last year, Ofcom concluded that the channel breached the broadcasting code after the presenter Josh Howie said the "full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons" at a church would "include paedos".

On that occasion, GB News was not sanctioned because it had already broadcast an apology.

It's stellar comedy: she performs with such drive and command, a no-nonsense approach to lots of nonsense

▶ *Olga Koch powers through her show, Fat Tom Cruise, taking in frat-boy culture and the thought that 'teenage girls are more emotionally intelligent than any man'*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW KIMBER

Edinburgh comedy review

This fast-talker pirouettes from zinger to zinger

Olga Koch: Fat Tom Cruise
Pleasance Courtyard
★★★★☆

Brian Logan

From the outset, Olga Koch's show Fat Tom Cruise looks like it's got something meaningful to say. It's not just the screens and sleek stage furniture, on to which details of US legal cases are projected. It's also our host's swaggering authority: Koch powers through like a woman on a mission. So what's its agenda, this new set that professes to tell a story that really isn't Koch's own? Well, it's that men's self-esteem issues are laughable and that "teenage girls are more emotionally intelligent than any man".

Hmm, I thought. Until, in due course, Koch is revealed to be engaging in a bait-and-switch. But first, the story in question, which traces the young Koch's journey from school senior, avenging herself on an unrequited crush, to college student in the US. Here, our host is drawn into fraternity culture - first at a hazing ritual in which she reluctantly participates, and later when buddying up at a wedding with a man (our eponymous hero) nostalgic for his frat-boy past. Interspersed is a briefing on several real-world gender-equality lawsuits that alleged, and proved, unfair discrimination against men.

What, one wonders, is Koch up to? Certainly, she's up to stellar comedy: she performs with such drive and command, a no-nonsense approach to lots of nonsense, pirouetting across the stage to celebrate this or that zinging put-down. And with such well-honed wisecracks too!

Her wider project, meanwhile, is revealed at the end, as Fat Tom Cruise's fate suggests male vulnerability may not be such a laughing matter. It's a sentiment worth endorsing, even if I found this denouement a little earnest and crudely engineered. But this remains a substantial set from one of the fringe's most reliable purveyors of big-payload comedy.

Until 30 August

Perfect casting: Elaine C Smith as Cathy

Stage review

Waspish wit from a snappy female-centric social comedy

Cathy
Traverse theatre
★★★☆☆

Mark Fisher

Eilidh Loan marked her arrival as a playwright with Moorcroft, a tremendous male-centred comedy inspired by her father's amateur football team. Now she has moved up a generation to write a female-centred family comedy inspired by her grandmother.

It was the older woman who stipulated that her character - the Cathy of the title - should be played by Elaine C Smith, a decision so spot on it suggests she missed her calling as a casting director. It's hard to imagine an actor who could better embody Loan's vision of a newly widowed working-class woman whose grief is veering towards depression. She lands Loan's jokes - acerbic and sharp - with battle-hardened precision.

She craves the love of neither the audience nor anyone else on stage. Her every discomfort is voiced - sod the consequences. Her waspish tongue and world-weary sourness go down several layers before we see the vulnerable person beneath. She cannot see herself making it as far as Christmas.

The setting is the aftermath of the funeral of Tommy, Cathy's husband of 50 years, and the play begins with the kind of gallows humour characteristic of such events. Any mention of death makes one person laugh and another burst into tears.

As social comedy it is snappily observed, but it is also dramatically underpowered. The only thing at stake is the family's cordial relations in the absence of the placatory Tommy, and it hardly seems to matter whether Cathy and Flo can patch up their mother-daughter conflicts. New life and a Christmas resolution provide a touching ending, but even with the big laughs, it covers limited emotional ground.

Until 30 August

Police explore whether Widdecombe suspect is linked to Farage break-in

Vikram Dodd
Police and crime correspondent

Police are investigating whether Joshua Kerry, the man charged with the murder of Ann Widdecombe, had any role in an attempted burglary at a former London home of Nigel Farage.

After an investigation by counter-terrorism police, Kerry, 28, from Rotherham, was charged with murdering the former Reform UK and Tory politician, who was found dead at her Devon home last month.

Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) London said on Friday that it was reinvestigating an April 2025 incident at an address where Farage was living at the time.

CTP South East, which is investigating the murder of Widdecombe, is also now investigating the 2025 incident, which was initially recorded as a burglary. Other sources have described it as an arson attempt.

The Guardian understands that detectives are studying fingerprints taken from the scene, as well as video from CCTV cameras in the area and from devices such as video door bells. They have also examined the scene to see if an accelerant, such as lighter fluid, was used.

▲ *Nigel Farage talking to reporters yesterday; Ann Widdecombe, below, was found dead; Joshua Kerry, left, is charged with her murder*
PHOTOGRAPH: RASID NECATI ASLIM/GETTY

On Friday, CTP London said it had referred itself to the police watchdog over the initial investigation.

In a statement, CTP said: "As part of the ongoing investigation led by Counter Terrorism Policing South East into the murder of Ann Widdecombe, officers have re-opened an investigation into an incident reported to police last year.

"In April 2025, the Metropolitan police received a report of an attempted burglary at an address in the Greater London area.

"Enquiries were carried out by the Metropolitan police, supported by Counter Terrorism Policing London. No arrests were made, and the investigation was subsequently closed, pending any new lines of enquiry.

"Following the re-opening of the attempted burglary investigation, Counter Terrorism Policing London identified a line of enquiry which was not identified and pursued by them at the time, which may have been relevant.

"As a result, to ensure their support to the initial investigation is thoroughly reviewed, Counter Terrorism Policing London made a mandatory conduct referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) today, Friday 7 August 2026."

Farage said yesterday: "It's a great, great tragedy that it took the death of Ann for the security services in Britain to finally take seriously the safety and security of Reform politicians and Reform prominent figures."

The Reform UK leader said he now had confidence in counter-terrorism police and that they were not trying to cover anything up.

Of CTP's decision to refer itself to the IOPC, he said: "The fact they have done that shows you they are not trying to cover up, they are not trying to ignore, and I have to say, I have met Laurence Taylor [the head of CTP], and I did feel a great, great confidence in it."

Widdecombe's body was found with "serious injuries" by paramedics at her home in Haytor Vale at 11.40am on 9 July. A court heard that the 78-year-old died after being hit on the head with a hammer 21 times.

Her murder has not yet been declared a terrorist incident. CTP South East took the lead in the investigation because of the possibility there may have been a political motive behind her killing.

CTP's investigations continue.

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Daniel Kinahan (back right) leaving the criminal courts of justice in Dublin. Above, Portlaoise prison, where Kinahan is being held. Below, wanted posters in Dublin city hall and, bottom, a sketch of Kinahan in court

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK MARLOW/PA; NIALL CARSON/PA; MIKE O'DONNELL

Dubai to jail cell: Kinahan's drastic change of lifestyle

Rory Carroll
Ireland correspondent

It sounds like the penal equivalent of five stars: a private gym and library, daily outings to the exercise yard and a landing cleared of other prisoners.

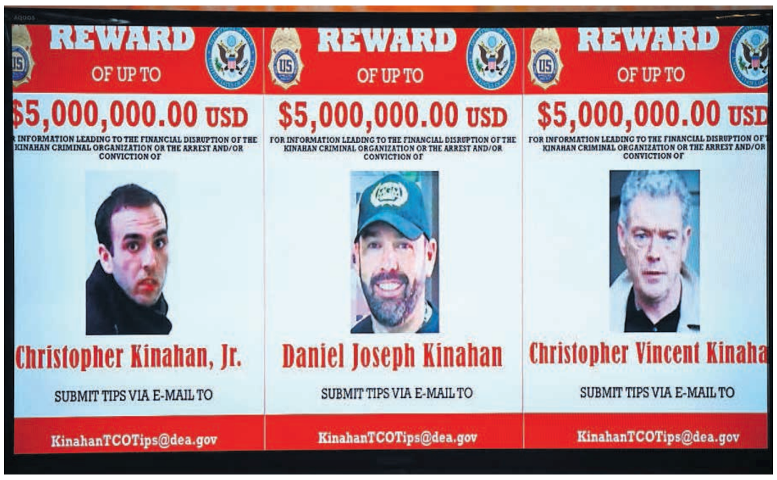
Daniel Kinahan's first full day inside the walls of Portlaoise prison yesterday, however, marked a drastic change from his luxury lifestyle in the United Arab Emirates.

The alleged leader of the Kinahan organised crime group is confined to a cell for about 20 hours a day, and instead of presiding over an empire said to be worth hundreds of millions of euros his only outlet for expenditure is the tuck shop.

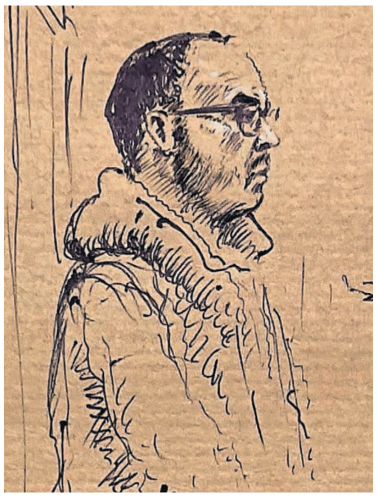
The facilities, it turns out, are meagre consolation – a treadmill, some free weights and limited reading material. "The so-called gym and library are nothing much," one source told the Irish Times. "The gym is probably slightly bigger than a box room in a house."

That is the reality facing Kinahan, 49, for months until his trial – and possibly decades if convicted. The Dubliner remains innocent before the law, but his extradition on Sunday represents a victory for the Irish state and law enforcement agencies across the world.

Kinahan was named a leader of a cartel said to control about a third of Europe's cocaine supply, along with running criminal sidelines in firearms and racketeering. But from his base in Dubai he appeared impervious to such allegations for almost a decade, while becoming an influential figure in sport through his boxing management company MTK Global, which arranged championship bouts.



REWARD
OF UP TO
$5,000,000.00 USD
FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE FINANCIAL DISRUPTION OF THE KINAHAN CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION OR THE ARREST AND/OR CONVICTION OF
Christopher Kinahan, Jr.
Daniel Joseph Kinahan
Christopher Vincent Kinaha
SUBMIT TIPS VIA E-MAIL TO
KinahanTCOTips@dea.gov



That changed after the US offered a reward of up to $5m (£3.7m) for information that led to his arrest or conviction. The Treasury Department said the Kinahan group had engaged in a gang war with another group in Ireland and Spain, "resulting in numerous murders".

The US bounty helped Ireland to secure an extradition treaty with the UAE last year, paving the way for Kinahan's arrest in Dubai in April.

After failing to block extradition, Kinahan was flown in an Irish government jet to Casement aerodrome on Sunday and taken to the criminal courts of justice in central Dublin where he was charged with directing organised crime.

> **'The so-called gym … is probably slightly bigger than a box room in a house'**
>
> **Irish Times source**

Told by one of the three judges that a bail application would have to be made to the high court, the prisoner was phlegmatic. "I think we know I won't be getting bail, but thank you," he said.

Observers at the hearing noted that Kinahan, wearing a black hoodie, black tracksuit bottoms and white trainers, looked older than the photographs that show a smiling, more youthful figure. He was pale, reflecting his incarceration since April.

Crowds lined part of the route to watch as he was driven in a Garda car – not a blast-proof prison van, as originally expected – to Portlaoise, a high-security prison 50 miles outside Dublin that used to house republican paramilitaries and is now home to drug gang members and others convicted of serious crimes.

Kinahan is the sole prisoner on a landing in A block that usually hosts eight inmates. During visits to the yard, which has wire netting to prevent contraband being dropped in, he will be alone. He will be served breakfast at 8am, lunch at 12.30pm and supper at 4.30pm and have a tuck shop account to buy personal items from the prison shop.

Video calls will afford contact with his wife and children in Dubai. A glass pane will separate him from in-person visitors. Kinahan is scheduled to return to the non-jury court on 5 October.

Met officer enjoys drive in £3.7m Ferrari seized during crackdown

Matthew Weaver

A police officer got the opportunity to drive an open-top limited-edition Ferrari in Mayfair, London, after the car was seized as part of a record-breaking crackdown on uninsured vehicles and dangerous driving.

The Dubai-registered supercar, worth £3.7m, had been in the UK for just a day when it was confiscated by the police because it was being driven by someone with a provisional licence and no insurance.

A police officer wearing sunglasses drives the seized Ferrari Monza

Instead of loading the sports car on to a flatbed truck used for such seizures, a Met officer wearing sunglasses drove the car to the pound.

Footage of the incident showed him driving the Ferrari Monza SP2 – one of only 499 made by the Italian company – around Mayfair and Marble Arch, escorted by police vehicles including the empty flatbed truck.

It was one of 90 vehicles worth a combined total of more than £8m seized over the weekend as part of an operation with the Motor Insurers' Bureau (MIB) cracking down on uninsured motorists and antisocial and dangerous driving around Hyde Park, Kensington and Chelsea.

The Met said it was the highest number and value of vehicles seized in the operation's five-year history.

Fifteen of the vehicles were seized under new powers allowing police to confiscate them rather than give a warning if they are involved in antisocial behaviour.

Angus Eaton, the chief executive of the MIB, said: "Operations like these show that the rules apply to all motorists, regardless of the value of the vehicle they chose to drive.

"We urge all motorists to check they have cover in place and that it's adequate for them, their vehicle, and their journey types."

The operation also involved a man arrested on suspicion of handling stolen goods and money laundering after he was found with 19 bank cards in other people's names and more than £2,500 in cash.

Another man stopped for driving without insurance was arrested on suspicion of possession with intent to supply drugs; a third man was arrested for using words and behaviour that would be likely to cause harassment, alarm and distress; and a fourth was arrested on suspicion of an immigration offence.

Broken by the system

What one mother's suicide reveals about desperation of carers

Josh Halliday

Two days before she died, Matilda Davis issued a plea on Facebook. Sharing a study that found more than 40% of parent-carers had considered suicide, she called for "greater awareness, action and change" in Britain's broken social care system. "This speaks the words I can't," she wrote.

Matilda, known as Tilly to her family and friends, had spent years battling for support in a regime that close observers and those who rely on it often say is increasingly confusing, fragmented and difficult to navigate.

Her seven-year-old son, Jude - not his real name - has significant disabilities. She was, her friends said, an "absolutely inspirational" mother, juggling care for Jude's five-year-old sister, Lilly - also a pseudonym - alongside Jude's appointments at therapy, physio, hospital and two schools, as well as the significant financial and administrative burden.

She cherished every moment with her children. "Tilly cared more than anyone I know," said her sister Georgina Davis, 35. "It was what she lived for."

On 3 October last year, Matilda, 36, was found dead in the bathroom of their home in Stratford-upon-Avon in the West Midlands.

She had taken her own life a day after saying she felt "completely exhausted" by her responsibilities, and "paralysed with anxiety" about the prospect of her looming divorce from her estranged husband, who the Guardian has chosen not to name.

▲ *Matilda with her son, who became critically unwell soon after his birth*

After Andy Burnham promised the biggest reforms to social care in a generation, experts said Matilda's death showed how carers were being "pushed to breaking point" by a "broken" system.

"Health and social care services in England are failing disabled children, and their parents are being left to pick up the pieces," said Dr Siobhan O'Dwyer, a leading expert on family carers.

"In his speech the prime minister acknowledged that without support unpaid carers can break. But what does it mean to break? For Matilda it meant death by suicide, it meant dying alone and in pain because services failed to fully appreciate the impact of the caring role and the troubled marriage, and it meant leaving behind the children she loved more than anything else in the world.

"That is a break that can never be healed, but it was entirely preventable. If the government really wants to stop other carers breaking, it's going to need more than a heartfelt speech. It's going to need real action."

'I won't be here much longer'

Evidence heard at Matilda's inquest earlier this year, including GP records and disclosures to professionals, showed a woman engulfed by stress in the final weeks of her life.

Last August she told her GP she was worried about her "ability to cope emotionally with the daily demands as a parent-carer living with a home environment which is becoming increasingly stressful, full of anxiety and worry".

"My absolute focus is to ensure [Jude and Lilly] are spared the turmoil of the unrest and upset in the house," she said.

Matilda had struggled with her mental health since Jude became critically unwell shortly after his birth. But two days before she died, she was in the "slight depths of ruin", she told a friend in a voice note. "I'm just in pieces and I'm trying to hold it together with the children, but it's so physically taxing and emotional with what I'm dealing with [Jude] alone," she said. "I'm just breaking really. I'm just completely broken. I haven't really got any physical strength in me."

Matilda had given up work as an art teacher to care for Jude full time. Social workers had not carried out a family care assessment, where professionals assess what support they might need, for almost four years by the time she died. They were due to visit the following week to carry out an updated plan.

On 2 October, Matilda told her divorce solicitor the worry was "overwhelming". "My capacity to earn is basically nothing and will be long term," she said.

Her day to day life was packed with "appointments, rehabilitation, admin, emails, phone calls, transporting/commuting", she said, which would become more complex over the coming years with Jude's schooling and health needs.

With her marriage coming to an end, Matilda said she was "desperately fearful" about the future of their home, as she had sacrificed years of earnings to care for Jude full time. "The estate agents will not accept me as a non-earning single occupant and I have absolutely no where else suitable to go," she said the day before she died, the inquest heard. She said she felt "financially trapped" and that it was "both physically and emotionally relentless at times".

> *'Love does not mitigate the pressure of caring for a disabled child in a broken system'*
>
> **Dr Siobhan O'Dwyer**

▶ *Matilda Davis, described by friends as an 'absolutely inspirational' mother, took her own life two days after saying she felt 'completely broken'*

That morning, her husband called social services to say he was concerned about Matilda's mental health. He said she had expressed suicidal thoughts that morning by saying: "I won't be here much longer and then you will all have to look after yourselves."

Social workers, who are obliged to act on welfare concerns within 24 hours, visited Matilda at home at 2pm the following day, a Friday.

A note of the meeting, shared at the inquest, details how Matilda was "visibly upset and tearful" when they arrived and "expressed significant anxiety" about the visit.

The coroner, Deborah Sewell, noted that Matilda spoke of the "emotional and psychological strain arising from relationship conflict, financial pressures, and the ongoing divorce proceedings".

Matilda told the social workers she had hit her head on the door in front of the children that morning "as a manifestation of emotional frustration". Before they left the meeting, social workers suggested that her husband look after the children that weekend and that Matilda stay with her parents.

She was reluctant to leave, having already expressed concern about how Jude would manage without her. When they left at 2.30pm, Matilda "appeared calm" and there was "no indication of any suicidal ideation", the note of the meeting recorded. Minutes later, she was dead.

At the inquest in March, social workers admitted they did not ask Matilda whether she had thoughts of suicide, despite knowing she was in significant distress. Nor was she directed to crisis organisations.

Neither social worker who visited her that day had undertaken suicide prevention training. When told it was best practice to ask someone directly whether they had plans to kill themselves if they had expressed suicidal thoughts, one said: "Well, I've not done the training."

Asked whether they were concerned that Matilda had said a day earlier she "won't be here

much longer" - which they were told by her husband was a suicidal thought - the social worker added: "Obviously it is concerning she said that but she wasn't using the word 'suicide'."

Sewell, the coroner, issued a rare prevention of future deaths report in April to direct Warwickshire council to make suicide prevention training mandatory for 600 members of staff.

Warwickshire council said: "We extend our deepest sympathies to the family and all those affected by this tragic loss. Following Matilda's death and the subsequent coroner's inquest, we have implemented enhanced suicide prevention training for all social workers to equip staff with skills to identify when parents and carers need additional support and to help them to access it.

"In addition, all agencies involved with this case will participate in a review to look closely at all the circumstances leading up to Matilda's death. The purpose of the review will be to make recommendations for improving services and support."

◀ *Matilda cherished every moment with her children, but her son has significant disabilities and she had spent years battling for support*

'Love does not mitigate the overwhelming pressure'

In research published in 2024 - and shared by Matilda two days before her death - the University of Birmingham found that 42% of parent-carers had thought about suicide, a much bigger proportion than for the general population.

O'Dwyer, who led the research, said those caring for significantly disabled children were exposed to chronic levels of extreme stress that were "compounded by other factors like poverty, domestic abuse, or social isolation".

She said social workers often had an "excess of professional optimism" about parents' ability to cope with the pressures of caring for children with complex needs, particularly when they saw a devoted, loving mother and reasoned she would never act on thoughts of self-harm because she loved her children so much.

"But it is possible to love your children and be pushed to the point of suicide," O'Dwyer said. "Love does not mitigate the overwhelming pressure of caring for a disabled child in a broken system."

Contact, a charity for families with disabled children, said parents often reached crisis point before help was available and had to "fight for basic support".

Anna Bird, its chief executive, said parent-carers were being "squeezed from every direction - by the cost of living crisis, reduced services and a support system that is increasingly confusing, fragmented and difficult to navigate".

In the garden of Jude's primary school in Birmingham, two apple trees and a rose bush have been planted in Matilda's memory. Twenty miles away in Stratford, her friends at a family club have raised money for a bench engraved with her name and a number for the Samaritans suicide helpline.

Davis described her sister as "the most incredibly devoted mother", draining her savings and driving hundreds of miles a week to get Jude the support he needed.

"She would tell me how she had to really fight to get what she wanted and needed for [Jude]," Davis said, adding that Matilda often talked about "how exhausting it is having to continually have to battle to get the provision he so needs".

Matilda's friend Francesca Roberts, a nursery manager, said she had been constantly in awe of Matilda's ability to go "far beyond what any parent should have to do simply to access proper care and support".

"She absolutely adored her children and dedicated every part of herself to them," she said. Matilda was "one of the most caring, devoted, and selfless people I have ever known", she added. "She was the village that everybody dreams of having around them."

The Samaritans suicide prevention charity can be contacted for free on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org

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◀ *SpaceX's mega rocket Starship lifts off for a test flight from Texas. The company is looking for new launch sites across the globe*

PHOTOGRAPH: ERIC GAY/AP

Backlash as SpaceX eyes rocket site on eroding US coastline

Oliver Milman

Plans by Elon Musk's SpaceX to build a vast rocket launch site on a stretch of Louisiana's rapidly eroding coastline have stirred a backlash among local opponents who fear it will badly damage the area's fragile ecosystem.

A deal for SpaceX to take control of 130,000 acres of coastal Vermilion parish is reportedly close to being finalised, allowing the company to escalate its number of launches, including of its new Starship mega rocket. SpaceX also has ambitions to deploy artificial intelligence datacentres in space, and while some experts have expressed doubts about this, it has submitted regulatory filings to build a constellation of up to a million of them.

The agreement with Louisiana's Republican leadership will enable SpaceX to build on an 18-mile strip of Pecan Island, a low-lying slice of land with just a few hundred inhabitants that sits south of the city of Lafayette.

The land was previously given up via a legal settlement with the oil company ExxonMobil, which was accused of worsening land loss and pollution through its activities in the area. ExxonMobil has described the lawsuits against it as "meritless".

Neither SpaceX nor Jeff Landry, Louisiana's governor, have confirmed the plan for the rocket site, although the space company did previously post on X, another Musk company, that thousands of Starship launches would "require the ability to launch from many different locations, so we are constantly exploring to find viable sites to expand Starship operations in the future, both domestically and internationally".

The prospect of a new spaceport spanning an area several times larger than Washington DC has alarmed some opponents in Pecan Island. Yesterday, a website was launched to rally opposition to the SpaceX plan, with its organiser warning the huge new facility would imperil a critical migratory bird habitat.

Hundreds of millions of birds, including snow geese, whooping cranes and 40% of North American waterfowl use Pecan Island as a crucial stop-off in their migratory flights through the Mississippi flyway, a vital corridor that birds use in seasonal flights between North and South America.

"We have existed alongside oil and gas for over 100 years, we aren't against industry, but we haven't blasted off high-octane rocketry before," said Gabe Giffin, a Louisiana resident who set up the new website. "I think space is cool, too. But many of these birds need this area and we need to have a proper process in place for this."

Giffin and other critics have raised concerns about moves by federal and state governments to sweep aside requirements to follow laws such as the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act when approving such projects.

Musk, the world's richest person, is a leading donor to Republicans and undertook an unelected reorganisation of the federal government last year at the behest of Donald Trump.

"They are throwing out the rulebook to make my home a desolate wasteland for what? Rockets?" said Brooke Broussard, a teacher whose family has long lived on Pecan Island.

"I'm concerned about the already fragile hydrology of Pecan Island and its wetlands, and the quality of life for residents who live there despite the hardships. These are people who want peace, not crowds and traffic. This would set a precedent to allow dirty business without any sort of accountability."

Some locals do see opportunities arriving through jobs and investment brought by SpaceX, Broussard said, and even some protection from the onward march of the seas.

Perched on the Gulf of Mexico coast, Pecan Island is part of a fraying Louisiana coastline that is quickly eroding, losing about one football field of land every 100 minutes.

This rapid land loss is caused by rising sea levels from the climate crisis, as well as subsidence of the state's coastline. Scientists project Louisiana faces about 2ft of sea level rise by 2050, a scenario that imperils New Orleans and will drown almost all of Pecan Island, including its buildings.

"Some people are saying that SpaceX will build up the land here and save us but most of the people I've spoken to are against all this," said Broussard.

"It's all Trumpers on Pecan Island but people aren't for this. We are probably doomed, with all the storms coming. But my thing is that we should be allowed to go in peace. The people who continue to live there despite the peril deserve better."

Neither SpaceX nor Landry's office responded to a request for comment.

Eyewitness

A selection of photos taken yesterday as the UK braces for its fifth heatwave of the summer (clockwise from top left): a blaze at Holme Fen near Peterborough; a heathland fire in the New Forest near Ringwood; parched fields in Weymouth; Hollow Ponds near Wanstead, east London; smoke trails from a fire at Llangynidr Reservoir in Blaenau Gwent that started on Saturday; and Radnage recreation ground in Buckinghamshire

PHOTOGRAPHS: TERRY HARRIS; ANDREW MATTHEWS/PA; BNPS; HENRY NICHOLLS/GETTY; SWNS; JONATHAN BRADY/PA

World

▲ *The scene of a Russian airstrike that damaged a residential building in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, yesterday* PHOTOGRAPH: DARYA NAZAROVA/GETTY

Ukraine strikes oil refinery deep inside Russia, killing at least 13

Luke Harding

A Ukrainian drone strike on an industrial city deep inside Russia has killed at least 13 people, according to the local mayor, as Kyiv steps up its campaign of long-range strikes on targets far from the frontline.

Kyiv said it hit the Taneco refinery in the city of Nizhnekamsk, about 750 miles from the Ukrainian border. Footage circulating online appeared to show smoke rising from the refinery.

Ukraine's general staff said the raid was part of a campaign to reduce the "military potential of the Russian aggressor".

Russian investigators claimed civilian and industrial sites in the city had been hit. The head of the Tatarstan region, Rustam Minnikhanov, said a Ukrainian drone hit a hostel, killing nine people. He posted images showing a badly damaged building.

If the death toll is confirmed, the strike would be among the deadliest Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, underscoring the growing reach of Kyiv's strikes.

The Uzbek consulate said seven of the victims were Uzbek citizens, who had died as a result of a "terrible incident". Minnikhanov declared a day of mourning as Russian prosecutors opened a criminal case into alleged "terrorism".

Local video footage showed Ukrainian drones buzzing above the city's skyline, flying low over grey and box-like Soviet-era apartment blocks. Two plumes of black smoke could be seen rising above an industrial zone on the wooded outskirts of Nizhnekamsk.

The site is home to Taneco, one of Russia's biggest and most technologically advanced oil refineries, owned by Tatneft. It also houses a plant that produces rubber and petrochemical products. Ukraine previously bombed the area in June.

In an address on Sunday, Volodymyr Zelenskyy said "long-range sanctions" against the Kremlin and its war machine would continue. In recent months Ukrainian drones have wreaked havoc on Russia's oil export industry, even hitting refineries in Siberia, 1,550 miles from the frontline.

The governor of the Tyumen region in western Siberia said yesterday several Ukrainian drones had fallen on an industrial facility and emergency services were dealing with a fire.

> ***'Every Russian strike will be met with our response ... Russia's war will be felt more and more in Russia'***
>
> **Volodymyr Zelenskyy**
> *Ukraine's president*

There have been several strikes on warehouses belonging to Wildberries, Russia's equivalent of Amazon, and on oil tankers in the Sea of Azov and Black Sea. Ukraine's long-term goal is to slowly strangle the Russian economy so Moscow can no longer fund its war.

Zelenskyy described his country's remote bombing campaign as "entirely justified". He said on social media: "Every Russian strike [on Ukrainian towns and cities] will be met with our response. Russia's war will be felt more and more at their own home - in Russia … The only reason this is still continuing is Russia's unwillingness to end this war."

Russia's defence ministry said it had intercepted 456 Ukrainian drones flying above Russian territory and Crimea, which it annexed in 2014. Ukraine says it is knocking out its opponent's air defence systems more quickly than they can be replaced, creating air corridors or "doors" it can exploit.

Overnight, Ukraine's armed forces hit equipment depots and a repair unit in the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk parts of eastern Ukraine, while Russian-appointed local authorities said the Zaporizhzhia region in south-east Ukraine was largely without electricity yesterday after Ukrainian attacks destroyed power facilities. On Russia's Black Sea coast, power outages were recorded in parts of Novorossiysk, a big export port, and in the holiday resort of Gelendzhik, the regional authorities said on the Telegram messaging app.

There were unconfirmed reports that Russian ballistic missile launcher systems were destroyed inside Russia, not far from the border.

According to Telegram channels citing Ukrainian military sources, the targeted high-value military assets were in Russia's western Kursk and Bryansk regions. Both were used to launch Iskander and hypersonic Zircon missiles towards Kyiv.

Ukrainian prosecutors, meanwhile, said five people were killed on Sunday in a Russian artillery strike

Tupac Shakur
Trial begins 30 years after rapper's death
Page 24

Typhoon Dolphin
Record rainfall turns Shanghai 'into the sea'
Page 27

▲ *An apartment block was targeted during a Russian attack on Odesa, Ukraine, on Sunday night. Left: smoke billows from the Taneco refinery in Nizhnekamsk, Russia and, far left, a building hit by a Ukrainian drone in Donetsk* PHOTOGRAPHS: UKRINFORM/SHUTTERSTOCK; AFP/GETTY

on a village outside Kharkiv. Several houses were flattened as a result of an "enemy strike" on Buhaivka in the Chuhuiv district, they said.

Elsewhere, Sweden's security service said yesterday it had shut down a Russian spying operation that had tried to influence decision-making there and discredit the Nordic country as well as its EU and Nato allies.

The operation had been planned and directed by Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service and involved three people working under the cover of diplomatic immunity, the Swedish security service said in a statement.

"This is consistent with the threat we see Russia posing," a spokesperson said.

"We have been able to monitor what happened at these meetings between the individuals involved, what was said and what assignments were given.

"They are no longer in Sweden and we have been able to break up this operation," he added.

Additional reporting **Reuters**

Germany
Drone bomb at airport was Russian – US experts

Deborah Cole
Berlin

American intelligence experts believe Russia was behind an attack on a German airport last week with a drone laden with explosives, US media have reported, as Berlin remained silent on the likely culprit.

The interior minister, Alexander Dobrindt, has called the incident, in which a quadcopter with semtex plastic explosives attached was found next to a Ukrainian cargo plane at Leipzig airport, part of a "professional hybrid threat scenario" by a well-equipped foreign actor. But government officials have not levelled a specific accusation against Moscow.

The Wall Street Journal, however, has quoted US officials familiar with intelligence reports about the incident as saying the drone probably belongs to the Russian government.

CNN reported that Washington had concluded the drone came from a Russian secret service, citing a US defence official in Europe who noted that the explosive material found on the drone suggested a military manufacturer.

German officials said the drone managed to fly past Leipzig airport's defences. It was only immobilised when an alert airport bus driver ferrying a group of late-night passengers spotted and reported it, an estimated four hours after it breached the facility's security, averting what authorities have said could have been a multiple casualty event.

The same night, a DHL cargo plane, which had been forced to abort its landing at the airport owing to the discovery of the drone, then collided with an unknown object in midair as it was climbing away from the airport. It later landed safely elsewhere, with minor damage.

Investigators now believe it hit a second hostile drone being flown that night.

The German tabloid Bild reported yesterday that authorities had found DNA traces at the scene that matched a sample from a firebomb, posted via DHL, that exploded at Leipzig airport in July 2024.

Five men suspected in a related series of mailed incendiary devices are on trial in Lithuania, where it emerged in court last week that the plane that was the target of the firebomb only avoided being set on fire in mid-flight because it was delayed. The suspects are alleged by Lithuanian prosecutors to have been employed by Russian intelligence.

A risky move Rejecting Gaza deal is a gamble for Netanyahu

Emma Graham-Harrison
Jerusalem

Benjamin Netanyahu's public rejection of a US-backed deal for Gaza has drawn scepticism in Israel amid reports he was personally hammering out details of a military withdrawal days earlier.

The Israeli prime minister is struggling to balance incompatible demands on Gaza policy from his domestic and international allies.

The far-right Israeli politicians who prop up Netanyahu's coalition government want to intensify Israeli attacks on Gaza and establish settlements inside the territory.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump, who provides vital diplomatic and military backing for Israel, wants to move towards a permanent settlement and return to Palestinian control in Gaza, brokered by the Board of Peace that he created and chairs.

With an Israeli election looming in just over two months, Netanyahu appears to have opted to publicly placate domestic partners who are already on the campaign trail.

On Sunday he rejected a new 15-point plan for Gaza that included a Hamas commitment to give up its weapons, meeting a key Israeli demand. He resisted US pressure to end wars in Gaza, Lebanon and Iran without Israel's buy-in.

The remarks blindsided Israeli commanders, who had been discussing implementation of the plan with Netanyahu and the Israeli chief of staff, Eyal Zamir, days earlier, Israel's Channel 12 reported.

"We learned about it today from the media," the television channel quoted a defence official saying. "At the meetings that were held until now, the prime minister personally gave his consent to this plan and to a withdrawal from the points in Rafah."

The meetings covered precise boundaries of three pilot areas in southern Gaza where a proposed international force – which has yet to be stood up – could take over from the Israeli military, and the interface between the two forces, the report said.

Netanyahu's public attack on the Board of Peace plan seemed like a particularly pointed rejection of US goals because it was released soon after a reported visit by Adm Brad Cooper, who heads US Central Command.

He came to deliver in person the message that the Trump administration wanted Israel to end its wars in Gaza and Lebanon, Israeli media reported. "The Americans' message to the IDF was to move in the direction of shutting down all three theatres of operations," a senior Israeli military officer told Channel 13 television.

Defying Trump, who is notoriously thin-skinned and intolerant of dissent, is a risky gamble when Israel is internationally isolated and needs US military supplies.

But Netanyahu has a long track record of audacious political manoeuvring, at home and internationally, undaunted even by ostensible power imbalances. Bill Clinton, after meeting him for the first time in 1996, is reported to have said: "Who's the fucking superpower here?"

In May 2024 the US president Joe Biden announced an Israeli-backed ceasefire and hostage release plan for Gaza, only to have Netanyahu distance himself from the proposal and ultimately reject it.

For now the administration in Washington appears to have largely shrugged off Netanyahu's comments as electioneering, perhaps encouraged by military decisions that indicate a far more attentive regard for Trump's wishes.

Last week Netanyahu scaled back Israeli airstrikes on Gaza by raising the threshold for authorising attacks. Targeted killings must now be approved by the chief of staff, rather than the regional commander, unless Israeli forces are in "imminent danger".

Nor is this the first time he has bowed to US pressure to rein in wars that have the enthusiastic backing of his far-right allies. He recently limited the offensive in Lebanon and last year ordered fighter jets headed for Iran to turn back at Trump's demand.

Netanyahu's combination of fierce domestic rhetoric and some conciliatory steps on the ground in Gaza may have bought him a bit of time, but US patience may not last until polling day in late October.

Trump is weighing up election concerns of his own, with the US holding midterms a week after Israel votes.

Netanyahu's visit to the White House last month was notably low profile for a leader who has repeatedly campaigned on his reputation as an international statesman and close relationship with the US president, Haaretz newspaper noted.

It ended without a joint statement, and strains caused by the Israeli prime minister's competing political priorities have become increasingly evident. "That's how it is when you try to juggle too many balls; you start dropping them," the paper said.

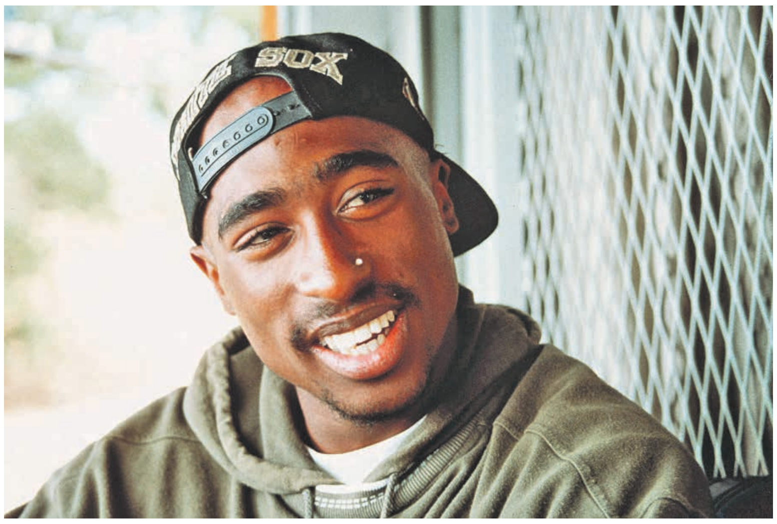
The top envoy for the Board of Peace, Nickolay Mladenov, declined to comment on Netanyahu's rejection of a deal that took months to hammer out. In an interview with Israeli media he said only that "discussions continue".

Palestinians in Gaza have endured nearly a year of deadly limbo after Trump brokered a nominal ceasefire last October, which he said would halt fighting and pave the way for reconstruction.

Netanyahu's office rejected reports that he had discussed detailed withdrawal plans for Gaza.

▲ *Benjamin Netanyahu has publicly rejected a 15-point peace deal for Gaza proposed by Donald Trump's Board of Peace* PHOTOGRAPH: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY

Jury selection starts for trial of former gang boss accused over Tupac Shakur's murder



▲ *Tupac Shakur was 25 and one of gangsta rap's most famous artists when he was killed in a drive-by shooting* PHOTOGRAPH: ELI REED/COLUMBIA/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

Reuters

Jury selection began yesterday in the murder trial of a former gang leader accused of masterminding the drive-by shooting of Tupac Shakur three decades ago - a crime that became a seminal moment in hip-hop history.

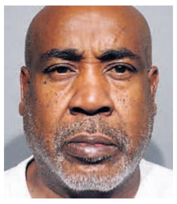
Duane "Keffe D" Davis is charged in Clark County, Nevada, with a single count of murder by use of a deadly weapon. He has pleaded not guilty.

Davis, 63, is accused of leading a group of men to kill Shakur, one of rap's most commercially successful and influential artists, in a 1996 drive-by shooting near the Las Vegas Strip.

The killing of the 25-year-old heightened the image of violence permeating hip-hop culture and its lyrics during "gangsta" rap's golden age, stoking the infamous East Coast-West Coast rap feud of that era.

Police said after Davis's arrest in 2023 that he was a longtime suspect but investigators had lacked enough admissible evidence to charge him until he began implicating himself in a series of public statements.

The trial, before Judge Carli Kierny, is expected to run for up to six weeks in a central Las Vegas courthouse. It may feature testimony from Death Row Records' co-founder Marion "Suge" Knight, a former rap mogul who was with Shakur the night he was slain and is now serving a 28-year prison sentence on an unrelated voluntary manslaughter conviction.



◀ *Duane 'Keffe D' Davis, now 63, is said to have implicated himself in the killing of Shakur in his memoir*

Authorities have described Davis as the "shot caller" of a hurried plot to avenge the beating of his nephew by Shakur and members of his entourage inside the MGM Grand casino in Las Vegas on the night of 7 September 1996.

The beating allegedly stemmed from hostility between two Los Angeles-area gangs – the South Side Compton Crips, of which Davis was the self-described leader, and Mob Piru, which police say was linked to Knight and Death Row Records. They were in town to see a world heavyweight title boxing match between Mike Tyson and Bruce Seldon.

Davis allegedly obtained the gun and handed it to two other men in the rear seat of a white Cadillac as they rode about looking for Knight and Shakur's car after the brawl.

Shots were fired when Davis and the others caught up with the vehicle. Shakur was struck four times and died in hospital six days later. Knight, who had been driving, suffered a minor injury from a bullet fragment that grazed his head.

The murder investigation grew cold, but police said the case was reinvigorated in 2018 by statements Davis made to media outlets.Davis said in interviews and in his 2019 memoir, Compton Street Legend, that he was in the front passenger seat of the Cadillac and handed the gun to one of the two men sitting behind him, according to police.

But neither Davis's account nor the authorities have said who is believed to have fired the gun at Shakur. The three other men in the Cadillac with Davis have all since died.

Under Nevada law, Davis can be charged with murder if he took part in the crime without pulling the trigger.

In his book, Davis wrote that he was long considered a suspect in the murders of Shakur and a rival rapper, Christopher Wallace, who performed as the Notorious B.I.G. and was shot dead in Los Angeles in March 1997.

His killing remains unsolved, but there has long been speculation that he was gunned down in retaliation for Shakur's killing months earlier.

'It broke me': ICE hunger striker speaks out about force-feeding

José Olivares
New York

▲ *The Kurdish film-maker Gabar Choli was force-fed for eight months while detained by ICE in Texas*
PHOTOGRAPH: COLE BURSTON/THE GUARDIAN

A Kurdish man who was force-fed over the course of eight months while on hunger strike in US immigration detention has spoken out about it for the first time, describing how much the process harmed him physically and psychologically.

Gabar Choli, a film-maker and activist now living in Canada after being deported, described how he often endured the coercive treatment twice a day after being detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) when his asylum application was denied.

"It just broke me, mentally broke me," Choli said in an exclusive interview with the Guardian. "It came to a point that I decided to write my body an apology letter."

ICE officials force-fed Choli at the Port Isabel federal detention centre in Los Fresnos, Texas, from late May 2025 until he was deported this January, a Guardian investigation found. Choli had resorted to a hunger strike to protest against conditions at the facility and to push for a resolution to his immigration case.

He described how a team of guards would physically restrain him while ICE medical staff forcibly inserted a feeding tube through his nose and down his oesophagus and pumped nutritional liquid into his stomach.

"I was respectful. I just told them I am protesting for humane treatment, nothing else," Choli said. "But they were determined to break me."

Sources at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), ICE's parent agency, told the Guardian that between January 2025 and 4 August 2026 ICE obtained court orders for involuntary medical treatment for 18 hunger strikers.

Federal court records, including declarations by ICE doctors and officers, verify that Choli was subjected to force-feeding. Combined with interviews with medical and legal experts and an interview by phone with Choli himself, much of the secretive process is revealed. His case could be the longest documented case of force-feeding in ICE detention to date.

Choli arrived in Blaine, Washington state, in 2022. He had been living in Vancouver, where he was campaigning for an independent nation of Kurdistan, having come to Canada from what he considers occupied territory in Iran.

He said he had requested asylum in the US owing to death threats for his activism while in Canada, and lived in Los Angeles with a work permit while his case was in process. But he was arrested during an ICE check-in on 25 February 2025 - the month after Donald Trump returned to the White House - after his asylum case failed.

He began a hunger strike while in detention in California and was transferred to Texas. The DHS and ICE then requested an emergency court order from a federal judge to force-feed him.

"I am not suicidal," Choli wrote in a letter to the federal judge overseeing his proceedings. "I am using hunger strike as the only available option to protest the abuse and mistreatment."

The DHS and ICE said in court records that force-feeding Choli was necessary for his health, but also that his prolonged hunger strike posed "a serious threat to the security and good order" of the detention centre. They further accused Choli of attempting to "manipulate the immigration system" by striking.

During his first force-feeding sessions, he recalled occasions where a nurse working for ICE "shoved the tube so hard" that "he tore my nose from the inside".

After such sessions "they would take me to solitary cell and I would just choke on my blood and drink the blood from inside [my throat]", he said. Many of his court records are sealed, so the Guardian is not able to corroborate some details in Choli's account.

He did not have legal representation throughout the eight-month ordeal. Choli suffered injuries and medical complications, including swollen sinuses, damage to his oesophagus and stomach problems, court records show.

Dr Chanelle Diaz, an assistant professor of medicine at Columbia University's medical centre, who has reviewed cases of other detainees, said: "That is just not medical care - that is torture."

The DHS and ICE did not respond to specific questions about Choli's case. A DHS spokesperson said: "Any involuntary medical treatment is undertaken only pursuant to legal authority and under the direction of qualified medical professionals."

‘Our coast is our treasure’ Florida plans natural corridor to protect marine life

Richard Luscombe
Miami

From disappearing manatees to bleached coral reefs and oyster beds destroyed by hurricanes, the marine life in Florida arguably faces greater climate-related challenges than any other US state.

Now, wildlife authorities are attempting to bring some cohesion to tackling the diverse slate of issues by borrowing from a playbook that has already proved successful on land.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and its charitable arm, the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida (FWFF), have announced the creation of an ambitious “coastal corridor”, an interconnected chain of ocean-based projects and enhancements designed to preserve and nourish vulnerable marine creatures.

It replicates to a significant degree the state’s wildlife corridor, a 7m-hectare (18m-acre) project established in 2021 to provide a safe, contiguous habitat spanning much of Florida where rare or threatened land-based species including birds, reptiles, panthers and bears can flourish.

With projects including habitat restoration, fisheries enhancement and improved public access and coastal resilience along Florida’s Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the corridor aims to create a connected network of artificial reefs, oyster beds, seagrass and mangroves on which marine life can thrive.

“The goal is to protect and connect all these important habitats for fish and wildlife,” said Nick Wiley, a former head of FWC who is now the executive director of FWFF. “Everyone has seen how successful the wildlife corridor initiative has been, rallying everybody around the mission. The wildlife species needed these travel lanes and corridors across the state, but it also highlighted how private landowners contribute to federal, state and county public lands and how all that fits together.

“Our board members were really inspired by that, looking at our coast, our fisheries and the coastal communities, and from the beaches, estuaries, all the way out into the deeper water.”

The coastal corridor is designed to protect not just Florida’s precious marine legacy but also the economic riches of its waters. Recreational fishing alone brings in $14bn (£10.4bn) a year, and provides 120,000 jobs, the foundation said. Another $3.1bn and 39,000 jobs come from creating and maintaining artificial reefs.

Additionally, more than 2 million out-of-state anglers visit Florida each year, renting charter boats and ploughing plenty of dollars into hotels and restaurants.

“Our coast is our treasure,” Wiley said. “But we hadn’t really looked at it as a connected corridor all the way around the coastline. It’s like the wildlife corridor’s sister on the coast that shows how you connect our estuaries all the way out through the grass flats into the deeper water.”

FWC and FWFF leaders are partnering with local government, scientists, conservation groups and coastal communities. One early project is a collaboration with Collier county to lay a sizable new artificial reef about 13 miles from shore in the Gulf of Mexico.

Mike Norberg, a marine biologist with decades of experience in artificial reefs, who is also the coastal corridor’s project director, said a chain of prefabricated concrete structures measuring 2.5 to 4.5 metres (8ft-15ft) would be lowered on to the seabed and mimic natural reefs to attract fish.

“There’s a number of benefits for artificial reefs,” he said. “It removes pressure from natural reefs, which obviously have a lot of challenges, especially in south Florida, and also creates habitats in areas where none might have existed.

“In parts of the coastal waters, it’s largely just sand sea floor and not a ton of natural reefs, especially when you look in the northern Gulf or north-eastern side of Florida. So it’s a win-win both for the ecosystem as well as recreational opportunities, whether that’s fishing and diving or just going out and sightseeing and having fun.”

Norberg said strategic reef deployments were a priority for the first year, with other projects under way in Okaloosa county in the north-west of the state, and Duval county on the northern Atlantic coast. Future plans, he said, include exploring coastal restoration projects to help address beach erosion, the loss of mangroves that protect against storm surge, and the reduction in natural food stocks that sustain declining species, such as seagrass for manatees.

“We’re looking at various oyster bed restoration opportunities and how that can tie into this network of connected habitats, living shorelines. That’s a huge thing, one that helps improve coastal resiliency from a community perspective,” said Norberg.

“It also provides habitat for juvenile fish and adult fish to spend their time within an estuary before they move offshore. So there really is this opportunity to tie both inshore to offshore habitats and use that as a tool for marine resource management.”

To Wiley, the creation of the coastal corridor represents what he says is a peak of his decades-long career in wildlife conservation in Florida. “I see more excitement and opportunity on this one than anything I’ve touched,” he said. “As we’ve seen on the wildlife corridor, it will bring a deeper, richer identity to the state that will enrich and enhance the value of Florida for people that live here, and the people that want to come visit.”

▲ *A manatee, the marine mammal for which the state is famous, in Crystal River, west-central Florida; left, a coral reef at Key West*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY; JOSEPH PREZIOSO/AFP/GETTY

$14bn

Annual amount that recreational fishing contributes to Florida’s economy, providing 120,000 jobs

39,000

The number of jobs in the state that are created by making and maintaining artificial reefs

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Roman wreck full of wine jars found off Sicily after 2,100 years

Lorenzo Tondo
Palermo

A 2,100-year-old Roman shipwreck carrying about 500 amphorae has been discovered 3 miles off the coast of Mazara del Vallo in Sicily.

Italy’s cultural heritage police, the Carabinieri, investigated the wreck with the help of divers and underwater cameras after receiving a tip-off from fishermen. The vessel was found at a depth of about 46 metres (151ft) and was carrying hundreds of amphorae – ancient two-handled ceramic jars with a narrow neck – thought to have been used mainly to transport wine.

The wreck, measuring about 21 metres long and 6 metres wide, was described by Italy’s culture minister, Alessandro Giuli, as “one of the most important underwater archaeological discoveries of recent years”.

Giuli said the wreck offered “precious fragments of our history” and provided further evidence of the trade routes and exchanges that made the Mediterranean “a crossroads of civilisations”.

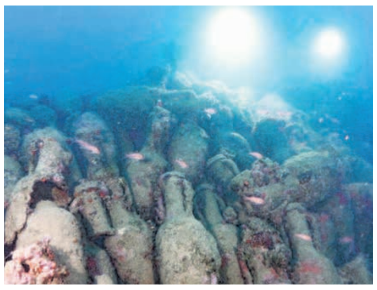
The divers Giacomo De Mola and Igor Bisulli described how they came across the wreck.

“Visibility wasn’t the best … I got closer. And my heart stopped. Below me was a vast expanse of amphorae,” De Mola said in an Instagram post with video footage of the discovery.

“This is, without a doubt, the most incredible discovery of my life,” he said. “It’s hard to describe what it feels like to be among the first humans, in nearly 20 centuries, to see that place again.”

Most of the cargo consisted of Dressel 1A amphorae, widely used to transport wine and particularly valuable to archaeologists because they can help reconstruct the commercial networks that linked Italy with other parts of the Mediterranean between the second and first centuries BC. Over the coming months, Sicily’s superintendency of the sea is expected to carry out a new phase of scientific documentation and research at the site.

Archaeologists will seek to establish more precisely the date of the wreck, the origin and intended destination of its cargo, and the condition of the surviving material, while also drawing up measures to protect what officials have described as a site of exceptional archaeological significance.



▲ *About 500 two-handled ceramic jars were discovered at the wreck site*

Additional reporting
Agence France-Presse

'There was a law that could send me to prison for 10 years simply because of who I was'

Erika Castellanos
Activist

▶ *Erika Castellanos, a human rights activist who was born and raised in Belize, was given six months to live when she was diagnosed with HIV in 1995*
PHOTOGRAPH: GATE

'Reaching 50 is a success story' Surviving HIV and transphobia in Latin America

John Musenze
Rio de Janeiro

Erika Castellanos has outlived what she describes as one of the cruellest statistics in Latin America. The life expectancy of a transgender woman in the region is estimated to be 35 years. "I am 50 years old. A lot of trans women are killed very early in life, either because of HIV or because of transphobia, so reaching 50 is a success story," she says.

When Castellanos was diagnosed with HIV in 1995, doctors gave her six months to live. She had spent years watching Aids devastate her community, with effective treatment beyond the reach of most people in low-income countries.

Looking back over the past 30 years, Castellanos, born and raised in Belize, says the medical breakthrough has been extraordinary. She began treatment in 2000 using whatever medicines arrived as donations to hospitals.

"When I was diagnosed, we were taking whatever came our way. Most of it came as donations from Europe and the United States. Science has come such a long way. Every time we're getting closer to a cure, closer to a vaccine," she says.

After moving from Belize to neighbouring Mexico in the early 1990s to live more openly as a trans woman, she survived through sex work and volunteered at an HIV hospice in southern Mexico.

"We barely had anything [at the hospice]. My mother paid for the snacks at our meetings. It was a time when treatment options were extremely limited. We were caring for people who were dying. We were giving comfort because there wasn't much else we could do."

Castellanos feared hospitals almost as much as she feared HIV, never knowing whether healthcare workers would treat her with dignity or subject her to humiliation. "There was a lot of stigma at the time. [Hospital staff] would tell me: 'You have HIV because you chose this life.' But I don't have HIV because I chose anything; I have HIV because there was no system that allowed me to protect myself. I was forced into situations that carried risks. Nobody would ever choose this," she says.

"I have lived through more than 30 years of promises, breakthroughs and funerals. I have watched medicine transform HIV from a death sentence into a manageable health condition. But I have also watched people including my friends die while those medicines existed. Science did not fail my friends. Politics did."

Today, Castellanos lives in the Netherlands and leads Global Action for Trans Equality (Gate), an organisation advocating for the rights of trans and gender-diverse people where her work focuses on improving access to healthcare, advancing human rights and supporting community organisations.

"My experience motivated me to fight for treatment and to create spaces where people living with HIV could have a voice," she said at the Aids 2026 conference in Rio de Janeiro last month.

Growing up in Belize, she says, laws criminalising people like her created constant fear. "When I was young, there was a law that could send me to prison for 10 years simply because of who I was. You wanted to tell your doctor the truth because you wanted the best care, but you were also afraid that being truthful could put you at risk."

She says those fears remain for many trans people today, especially in Africa, where criminalisation is on the rise.

Her concerns are echoed by Winnie Byanyima, executive director of UNAids, in the report UNAids Global Aids Update, which documents a global rollback in human rights including sexual and reproductive rights. In 2026, 168 countries criminalised sex work, 66 countries criminalised same sex sexual relations and 14 countries criminalised trans people.

"You cannot end Aids while criminalising people living with and most at risk of HIV," says Byanyima. "When people fear arrest, violence or discrimination, they stay away from HIV services. Human rights are not separate from the HIV response - they are essential to its success."

Castellanos warns that the recent international funding cuts, including the scaling back of USAID and the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar), risk reversing decades of progress, forcing communities back to a time when treatment options were limited, clinics were overwhelmed and community organisations were left to fill gaps in care.

Efforts to end Aids as a public health threat by 2030 are at risk unless global solidarity is restored and inequalities addressed, the report says.

Castellanos hopes leaders remember that HIV responses are ultimately about people, not politics. "It's OK if someone doesn't understand my life. They don't have to agree with me, they just have to respect my humanity."

Police use batons against young Indians protesting over job tests

Penelope MacRae
Delhi

Thousands of young people clashed with police in one of India's poorest states yesterday as a weeks-long protest over alleged irregularities in recruitment drives for coveted government jobs escalated into a march on the state legislature.

Police fired water cannon and swung batons as they tried to stop flag-waving demonstrators from clambering over barricades and surging towards the assembly in the Jharkhand state capital, Ranchi.

Some of the protesters responded by dancing and cheering as jets of water drenched the crowd.

The unrest comes weeks after the self-styled "cockroach" movement put the BJP-led national government under heavy pressure and forced the resignation of the education minister over leaks of a national medical entrance exam paper.

Protesters and police officers were injured in the Jharkhand clashes, local media reported, although no official figures were released. "The baton charge was barbaric. We were protesting peacefully," one protester, Piyush Kumar Soni, told the Press Trust of India.

The demonstrators are demanding an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation, India's premier investigative force, saying that only an independent inquiry can get to the bottom of alleged wrongdoing in government recruitment examinations.

They accuse authorities of failing to prevent irregularities, including test paper leaks and cheating, which they say have deprived young jobseekers of a fair chance.

Jharkhand has long struggled with high unemployment, and competition for civil service and other public-sector posts, which offer job security, health and pension benefits, is intense.

Government recruitment drives routinely attract hundreds of thousands of applicants, with many young people spending years preparing for examinations. In one recent recruitment exercise, nearly 640,000 applications were received for just 2,025 posts.

The state government, led by a regional party allied with the opposition Congress, has sought to defuse the crisis through talks. Officials say most of the protesters' demands have been accepted and that they are open to more negotiations.

The Congress party leader, Rahul Gandhi, condemned the use of force. "Students have a right to peaceful protest, and only dialogue can yield solutions," he said.

The row has already claimed senior figures. The former Jharkhand public service commission chair has been arrested over alleged exam irregularities, while three commission members have resigned.

Nearly two-thirds of Indians are under 35. Official data shows unemployment fell to 9.9% last year, but a study by Azim Premji University found nearly 40% of graduates aged 15 to 25 were unemployed.

640,000
The number of applications received for 2,025 government jobs in a Jharkhand recruitment drive

‘Shanghai turns into the sea’ as Typhoon Dolphin inundates China’s east coast

Reuters
Shanghai

Torrential rain and storms in Typhoon Dolphin’s wake have inundated China’s eastern coastal region and flooded streets in Shanghai, where about 40% of flights were grounded yesterday due to the weather.

Dolphin packed maximum sustained winds of 94mph near its centre when it made landfall in Zhejiang, south of Shanghai, on Sunday before weakening to a tropical storm.

More than 1.2 million people across Fujian province and the cities of Wenzhou and Shanghai were moved to safety as the typhoon approached.

Many streets in Shanghai, the country’s second most populous city, were flooded, including in the main commercial centres.

The city’s two airports cancelled 943 flights as a result of the typhoon, the state broadcaster CCTV said.

A weather station in central Shanghai yesterday recorded nearly 313mm (12in) of rain in the 24 hours to 7am local time, its highest 24-hour rainfall in more than 150 years of records. Another station in the city recorded nearly 400mm.

The hashtag “Shanghai turns into the sea” began trending on the Chinese social media platform Weibo as videos circulated showing flooded streets around Wukang Mansion, one of the city’s best-known landmarks.

“It rained almost all night last night. When I woke up this morning, I found the neighbourhood flooded,” said 39-year-old Hou Lina, who works in sales in Jiading in Shanghai.

“I’ve lived in Shanghai for 10 years, and this is the first time I’ve experienced such inconvenience from a typhoon. This is the first time I’ve encountered such widespread flooding,” she said.

In Shanghai’s Jinshan, the district authority said non-essential businesses and organisations could temporarily halt operations, classes, outdoor events and transit services, amid forecasts of continued strong winds and heavy rain.

Authorities warned that 74 rivers in the Taihu Lake basin and the coastal areas of eastern Zhejiang had exceeded warning levels, and that flood risks for small and medium-sized rivers in heavy rainfall areas were high.

The strongest typhoon to hit China this year, Dolphin is forecast to move inland to the central provinces of Hubei and Henan in the coming days, while also pushing moisture north.

Authorities in Beijing warned of torrential rain and said the capital was prepared to activate its flood control response this morning.

Beijing was expected to experience “significant rainfall” from today until Thursday, with authorities warning of flash floods in the city and landslides in surrounding mountains.

The typhoon travelled 6,000km (3,728 miles) before making landfall, giving it a life cycle three times longer than a typical typhoon, and bringing an ultra-large cloud system that enveloped China’s east, CCTV said.

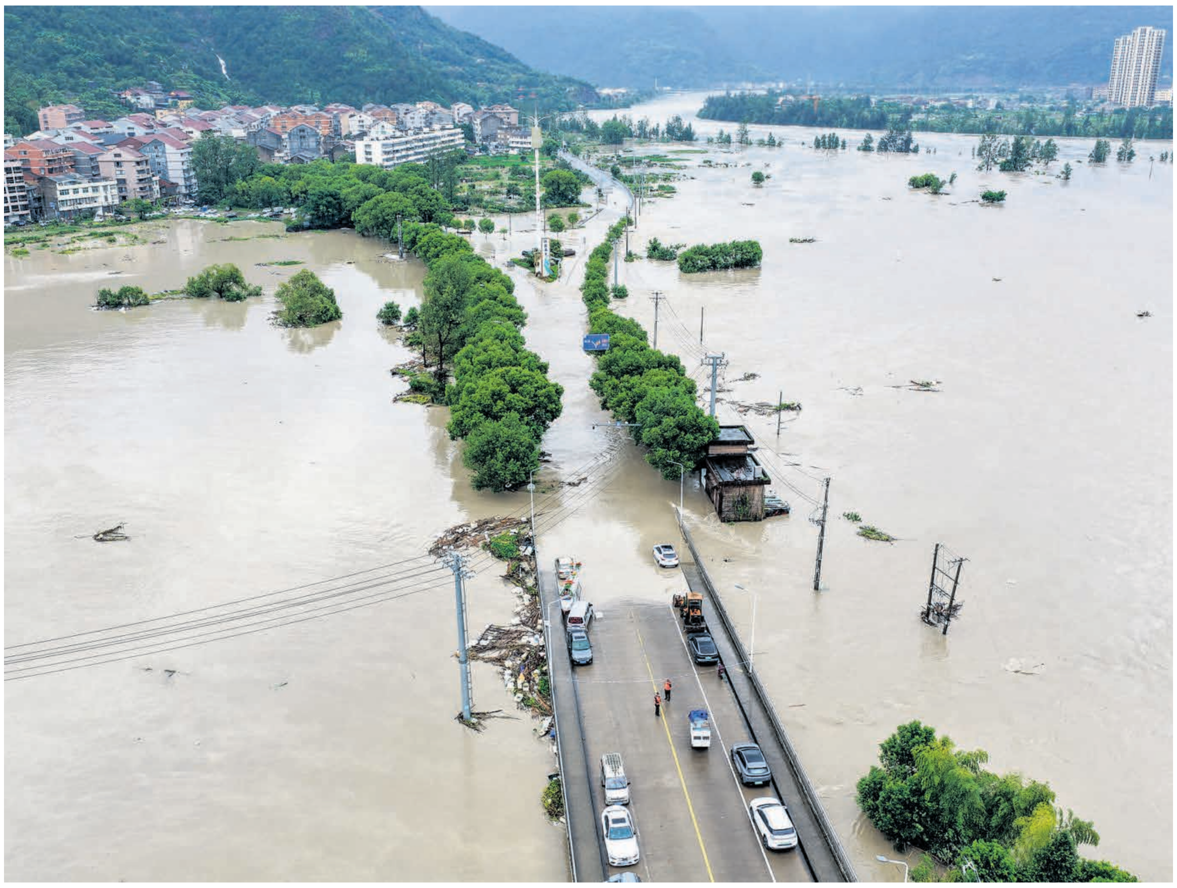
Dolphin’s impact was being compared with 2023’s Typhoon Doksuri, which crossed the country after causing destruction in south-eastern Fujian province, unleashing record rainfall on Beijing.

CCTV said Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei would need to brace for heavy rain into Thursday as the storm clouds met colder air in the north.

On China’s southern coast, Hong Kong reached 36.9C on Sunday, which the Hong Kong Observatory said marked its hottest day since records began in 1884.

The forecaster Tropical Storm Risk said it expected the 2026 north-west Pacific typhoon season to be one of the most active on record and to include 28 tropical storms, 20 typhoons and 13 intense typhoons.

It said the continuing strong El Niño event, high activity to date and weaker-than-usual trade winds across the north-west Pacific basin were key reasons for the intensity of the typhoon season.



▲ *Vehicles stranded on a flooded road in the Chinese city of Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. Top, a pedestrian braves the storm in Shanghai’s central Huangpu district and, left, a shelter for people fleeing the storm further south in Hangzhou*

PHOTOGRAPHS: VCG/GETTY; WANG XIANG/XINHUA/AP; PENG PENG/VCG/GETTY

> *‘It rained almost all night. This is the first time I’ve experienced such inconvenience from a typhoon, such widespread flooding’*
>
> **Hou Lina**
> *Shanghai sales worker*

Spain warns of raised wildfire risk as people flock to see solar eclipse

Stephen Burgen
Tarragona

Authorities in Spain have warned of an increased risk of fires when hundreds of thousands of people head to the hills and beaches to get a better view of tomorrow’s total solar eclipse.

“The vegetation is extraordinarily dry and the smallest spark or carelessness could lead to devastating forest fires,” the environment minister, Sara Aagesen, said on a visit to Niebla in the south of the country, the site of Spain’s latest fire.

Relentless heat and scarce rainfall have created ideal conditions for fires that have scarred swathes of Spain in recent weeks, including a huge blaze west of the capital, Madrid.

Police estimate that 1.5m extra car journeys will be made tomorrow, and there are fears traffic could block access for emergency vehicles if fires break out in rural areas. Parking on hard shoulders or close to dry vegetation has been banned, as have barbecues and fireworks.

As a precautionary measure, the Valencia region has closed its natural parks and has banned walking on rural footpaths.

Yesterday, the national weather agency, Aemet, said this July was mainland Spain’s joint-hottest month since records began in 1961. Last month was also mainland Spain’s driest July on record, with just 4.3mm of rain falling – just 26% of the normal precipitation for the time of year.

Hospitals are on alert for possible eye damage to people who do not wear the protective sunglasses that have been handed out for free all over the country before the eclipse. Six brands of glasses have been withdrawn after being deemed unsafe by the consumer association Facua.

People should wear the glasses before, during and after the eclipse, said Jesús Merayo Lloves, the head of the Fernández-Vega ophthalmology research institute, warning that looking directly at the sun could cause irreparable damage.

The total eclipse will cross Spain and is best viewed in a band about 120 miles wide from A Coruña in the Atlantic north-west to Mallorca in the Mediterranean. Accommodation in small towns and villages in its path, as well as makeshift observatories set up by local enthusiasts, have been booked out for months.

Nasa has installed four high-powered telescopes next to the church in the tiny village of Villalibado in north-west Spain, from which it will livestream the eclipse to more than 10 million viewers.

Nasa chose the village, which was abandoned for decades before being restored as a holiday destination, after almost a year searching for the perfect site to view the eclipse.

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SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

Business

John Lewis boss resigns amid ‘really tough’ trading conditions

Jasper Jolly

The managing director of John Lewis has quit after less than three years in charge of the British department store chain, as the company faces “really tough” trading conditions.

Peter Ruis will leave the business to “pursue new projects”, John Lewis said in a statement yesterday.

He will be replaced by Will Kernan, a non-executive board member of the employee-owned John Lewis Partnership, which also runs the Waitrose supermarket chain. Kernan said in a statement that John Lewis still had “significant headroom for growth”.

John Lewis’s chair, Jason Tarry, last week warned of “really tough” trading conditions in an interview with the company’s in-house magazine.

John Lewis had felt confident enough in the economic outlook in March to pay its 69,000 workers - whom it calls partners - an annual bonus for the first time in four years after underlying profits rose. Staff shared a bonus pot of £35m, worth about one week’s extra pay each.

However, the US-Israeli war on Iran has caused a rise in inflation as oil prices have soared. That has put shoppers under pressure and raised costs for retailers.

Tarry indicated in the interview that “we have to adjust for an immediate future that we weren’t expecting even six months ago, let alone a couple of years ago”.

Ruis had returned to John Lewis at the start of 2024, after leading retailers including Jigsaw and Anthropologie. During his previous nine-year stint, Ruis was John Lewis’s buying and brand director.

◀ *Peter Ruis said John Lewis was ‘on a much stronger footing’ after three years of investment and modernisation*

He oversaw investment in the 36 John Lewis department stores that remained after the company closed 16 during the coronavirus pandemic, and as recently as November he told the Guardian that he was looking at expansion.

Ruis will stay in post until 6 September. Kernan, a non-executive director since 2023, will take over in the middle of September as the retailer prepares for its Christmas peak trading period. John Lewis has started a search for a new non-executive director.

Kernan has previously served as chief executive of River Island, the White Company and the cycling retailer Wiggle, and spent 13 years at New Look.

Ruis said: “After nearly three years of significant investment and modernisation, the business is now on a much stronger footing. I’m so proud of what we’ve achieved, and there is so much more still to come.”

Kernan said: “Having served on the partnership’s board for three years, I have a clear understanding of the John Lewis business and a huge appreciation for the partnership’s values and employee-ownership model. We have significant headroom for growth and I’m looking forward to leading the team to ensure John Lewis remains the country’s most trusted and loved retailer.”

Tarry said: “Peter has done a fantastic job and will be missed by all of our partners. He’s injected energy and pace into the John Lewis transformation.”

From pop to spirits Beyoncé has acquired full control of SirDavis Whisky after the French group LVMH sold its stake. The brand began as a joint venture between the US singer and LVMH’s wine and spirits division.

PHOTOGRAPH: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/ THE MET/VOGUE/GETTY

Consumer confidence at 21-month high due to World Cup and new PM

Phillip Inman

Consumer confidence hit its highest level in nearly two years in July, according to research that indicated the closing stages of the World Cup and more people holidaying in the UK lifted summer spending. A truce in the Middle East conflict in June and the arrival of a new prime minister in Andy Burnham also gave a lift to consumers after a lengthy period of heightened uncertainty.

A long-running monthly consumer spending survey by Barclays showed that 30% of those surveyed felt confident about the strength of the UK economy in July - representing a 21-month high and a 6 percentage point improvement on June.

Consumer card spending rose by 2% year on year last month, after a 1.9% increase in June, Barclays said.

The bank said the study showed people felt more secure in their jobs and had more leeway to spend on non-essentials, with discretionary spending up 1.6%. Among the biggest beneficiaries were pubs, which enjoyed a 10% increase in transactions “thanks to England’s World Cup run”. It had been estimated the men’s football tournament had brought in £150m in added sales for British pubs.

Card spending at cinemas rose 2.6%, helped by the popularity of Toy Story 5 and The Odyssey.

In line with other surveys, the report found that the succession of heatwaves had depressed spending on air fares in favour of domestic holidays, which pushed up spending on UK accommodation by 2.6%.

Barclays said confidence in the European economy had also climbed, by 6 percentage points to 35%.

Harvey Nichols says it needs a rescue deal to avoid collapse

Jasper Jolly

Harvey Nichols has warned it will not be able to survive another year without new investment, as bidders circle for the Knightsbridge-headquartered department store chain.

The retailer’s Hong Kong-based owner, Dickson Poon, put it up for sale in June, with Mike Ashley’s Frasers Group aiming to buy it for about £40m.

Harvey Nichols used to attract high-profile clientele, such as Diana, Princess of Wales. But it has struggled to adjust to increased competition from other shopping destinations, as well as the rise of online retail.

The company has not made a profit since the coronavirus pandemic locked out big-spending foreign tourists, and it reported a loss after tax of £105m after writing off intercompany loans for the year to 29 March 2025, according to accounts published over the weekend.

The directors warned that the company was not a going concern because it would run out of money within the next year and that it had no agreements for new funding.

The accounts said the company had received “a number of bids” to buy it, and that it was hoping to complete a deal within the next year.

The FTSE 100 retailer Next had been interested in taking over the business, although it has withdrawn its interest, recent reports say.

That has left Ashley, the founder of the Sports Direct retail empire, as one of the frontrunners. Ashley, the controlling shareholder in Frasers, told the Financial Times on Friday that Harvey Nichols was in a “death spiral” and that it would be a “huge challenge” to turn it around.

Ashley has bought a series of struggling premium brands after starting out with a single sports shop. He said he would keep the Knightsbridge and Edinburgh stores, but rebrand other stores as House of Fraser or Flannels under his Frasers Group.

Harvey Nichols was founded in 1831, as a linen shop. Its department store headquarters in Knightsbridge opened in 1889.

Poon oversaw an expansion outside London, with a Leeds branch opening in 1996. The chain has shops in Birmingham, Bristol, Dublin, Edinburgh and Manchester, as well as a series of restaurants. Outside the UK, it has stores in Riyadh, Dubai, Hong Kong and Kuwait.

Poon retired as a director in May. Harvey Nichols is led by Julia Goddard, who joined in 2024 from Alexander McQueen.

Business view
Nils Pratley

Yes, the water companies are circumventing bonus rules. What did ministers expect?

Anybody who followed the supposed "clampdown" on bankers' bonuses after the great financial crash in 2008 knew what to expect when water company bosses became a similar target for a bash in the bonus department. We would see the waterbed principle in action: when you push down in one area of remuneration, such as the performance-related stuff, another tends to go up.

Back in the day, banks invented "role-based allowances" – salary top-ups – to "compensate", as they put it, their top earners for being subject to EU caps on bonuses. No executive was seriously inconvenienced by foregoing the chance of an astronomical (but not guaranteed) bonus and getting a smaller (but still hefty) increase in fixed pay instead. Some even preferred greater certainty over what they would take home.

In water-world, the Labour government arrived in 2024 promising to "ban the payment of bonuses to polluting water bosses until they have cleaned up their filth". But the flaw in the resulting Water (Special Measures) Act of 2025 was always obvious. While the regulator, Ofwat, was given powers to block performance-related bonuses at the worst environmental and financial miscreants, it could do nothing formally about other payments.

Thus – surprise, surprise – salary increases, allowance awards and, most of all, retention payments have proliferated. After the English and Welsh companies published their annual reports last month, this newspaper found that overall reported pay packets rose by 1.5% to £25.3m for chief executives and chief financial officers for the year. It was the second year in a row that a bonus ban had resulted in higher overall pay across the sector.

One can usually rely on Thames Water to muddy things further, and its post-annual report contribution was news that its chief financial officer, Steve Buck, who was paid £591,000 in the financial year to March, got a delayed £1m signing fee at the end of July. As for retention payments for other executives that were "paused" after a political kerfuffle a year ago, the company has "entered into 14 agreements" to "resolve its liability for any potential claims".

The government is shocked, or pretends to be. "It is unacceptable that one of the worst-performing water companies is handing out huge payments to its executives when it should be focusing on improving performance and rebuilding public trust," said a spokesperson for the environment department.

Thames Water

▲ *The government criticised a £1m fee paid by Thames Water to its CFO*

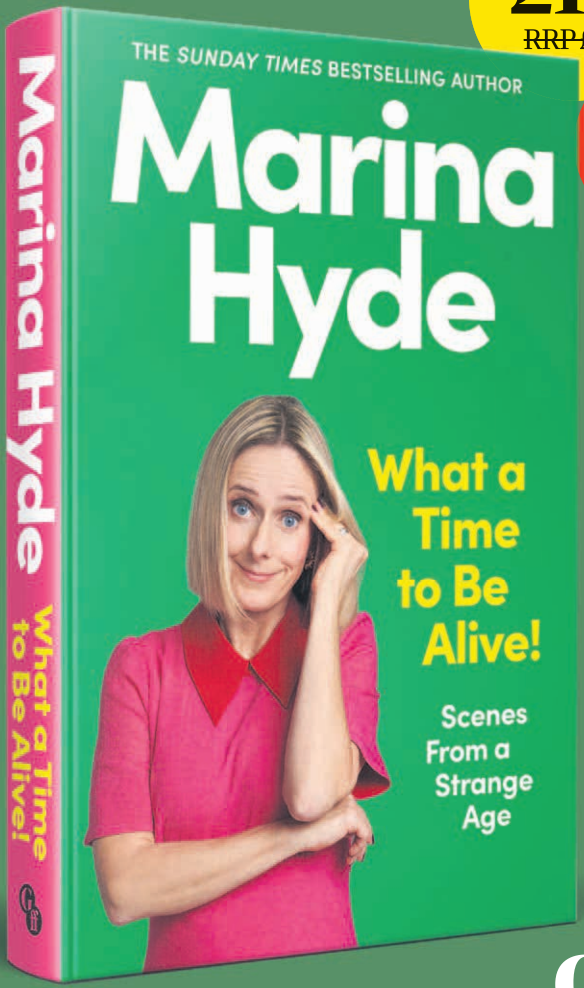
> *If ministers were relying on remuneration committees to obey the 'spirit' of their reforms, they were born yesterday*

Again, though, one must ask: what did ministers think would happen? It's easy to agree that executives of underperforming monopolies are grossly overpaid, but it was naive of politicians to think a ban on bonuses would not result in alternative wheezes.

Water companies in general have deployed the retention manoeuvre in less-than-transparent – or just shameless – ways, it should be added. Helen Campbell, the interim executive director of Ofwat, was clearly correct last month when she complained that customers' trust is harmed when remuneration committees make decisions that "give the appearance of circumventing the rule".

But the government left the door wide open to such behaviour. If ministers were relying on remuneration committees to obey the "spirit" of their reforms, they were born yesterday. Restricting bonuses is not the same as restricting overall pay. And Ofwat can only use the powers it was given by parliament.

The dance now moves to the regulator's review, due in the autumn, of whether the rules should be strengthened. Maybe it will yield something different in Andy Burnham's undefined era of "greater public control". On past experience, however, believe it when you see it.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‘It’s very, very challenging’

How Duke of Westminster’s farm takes on climate crisis

Julia Kollewe

The 2,600 cows at Lea Manor Farm in Cheshire produce 34m litres of milk a year, which is sold to Müller and Tesco

There is a distinctive smell of cow manure in the air at the Duke of Westminster’s dairy farm near Chester. It is a world away from the collection of grand properties he controls in London’s Belgravia and Mayfair, which forms the backbone of his near £10bn fortune, a decade after he became Britain’s youngest billionaire.

As part of his 349-year-old Grosvenor empire, Lea Manor Farm on the duke’s Eaton Estate in north-west England has fared better than most dairy farms in recent years.

But it has been hit by declining milk prices and other challenges faced by British farmers. A series of heatwaves causing drought, with a fifth looming this week - combined with fertiliser shortages triggered by the Iran war, diseases and a scarcity of workers since Brexit - have made farming very difficult.

Milk prices are cyclical. Higher farm-gate prices in the UK last year encouraged an expansion of production, and oversupply in Britain and overseas has led to price reductions of up to 50% this year, according to Mark Roach, the managing director of Grosvenor Farms. “I can’t imagine any other industries suffering a 50% reduction,” he said.

Lea Manor has been an arable and livestock farm for centuries. It focused on potatoes between 1984 and 2002, when it switched to cows after the realisation that growing potatoes in the heavy Cheshire clay was not sustainable.

The farm at the Eaton Estate, part of Grosvenor’s sprawling portfolio of offices, shops, homes, woods and farmland, has 77 staff and 2,600 Holstein friesian cows. It produces more than 34m litres of milk a year - 13,200 litres per cow - and supplies Müller and Tesco. It is surrounded by fields growing animal feed such as wheat, maize, barley and rye, set in 4,685 hectares (11,577 acres) of land.

This year’s heatwaves - supercharged by the escalating climate crisis - have piled more pressure on farmers. When temperatures rise above 25C, cows become more lethargic, eat less and produce less milk. At 36C during the June heatwave, each Grosvenor cow produced up to 6 litres less milk a day, with the heat partly mitigated by a sprinkler system and the farm’s large airy barns.

At some other farms, the milk yield was down as much as 10 litres a day for each cow, said Roach. “It’s very, very challenging for farming.”

Mark Preston, an executive trustee of Grosvenor, said: “Extreme weather in many parts of the northern hemisphere is affecting crop yields and farm economics. Farmers are adapting where they can, but the full impact is likely to become clearer over the next growing season, reinforcing the importance of building greater resilience into the UK’s food production system.”

With almost three-quarters of England and all of Wales officially in drought, leading to wheat growing to half the normal height and a broccoli yield down 50%, the UK has been forced to import more food from countries such as Spain, while global prices are rising.

Many British farms are loss-making. Lea Manor, Grosvenor’s only dairy farm, is profitable owing to a big revamp that began in 2012 to improve efficiency using technology. The farming division made a profit before tax of £2.6m in 2024, down from £3.6m the previous year, with turnover of £16.2m. By contrast, Grosvenor made an underlying profit of £88.7m from its UK properties last year, up 14% on 2024. The duke received dividends of £53.7m from the group in 2025. Despite the differing scale, Roach said the farm was “not a hobby of the duke; it’s a commercial business”.

Hugh Grosvenor is one of the UK’s richest people, who, upon the sudden death of his father in 2016, inherited the vast estate his family has owned for centuries. The bequest was largely shielded from 40% inheritance tax because the estate is held in a series of trusts rather than by the duke personally. Grosvenor said it paid inheritance tax through a recurring 6% payment on the value of its assets every 10 years, instead of a single payment of 40% upon death.

At Lea Manor, the cows are led three times a day from their open-sided barns to an indoor carousel, where they are milked using automated machinery. The milking unit is attached by a farm worker but comes off automatically once the udder has been emptied to prevent overmilking, which can lead to mastitis. Two robots clean the teats before milking and disinfect them before the animals step off the carousel. Standing in 60 berths, 360 cows can be milked in an hour.

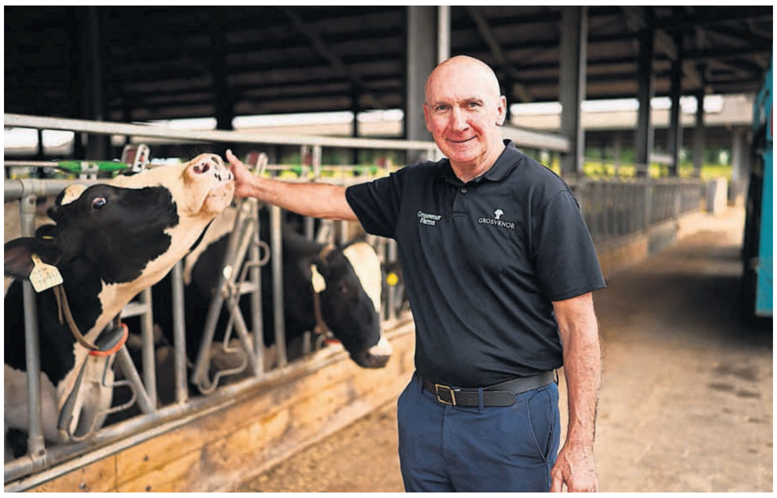
Three tankers are filled every day with 29,000 litres of milk pouring into each tanker, plus another partly filled tanker, which then go to a Müller plant in Manchester. The milk is on Tesco supermarket shelves the next morning.

Sensors in the floor measure how the cows walk. If they show signs of having a sore foot, they will get a foot bath to prevent rot. Sometimes the cows do not want to get off the carousel and have to be guided out of the door back to their barn.

The rise in factory-style dairy farming has raised concerns over farms using intensive systems to increase productivity from “battery cows”.

Grosvenor insists that overall its cows are healthy, pointing to its own statistics. “Unhealthy cows do not produce much milk,” Roach said. Its milk is not classed as organic, but the farm feeds cows grass and has no routine use of antibiotics.

The group says the barns are larger than industry standards and open on the sides, allowing plenty of natural light and airflow. However, the cows are not put out to pasture, and stand on concrete floors with anti-slip grooves. Only 8% of dairy herds in the UK are housed all year round, according to the RSPCA, which says cows should be allowed to graze some of the time.



Mark Roach of Grosvenor Farms says an oversupply of milk has led to price reductions of up to 50% this year PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/THE GUARDIAN

Grosvenor said: “The health of our herd, low incidence of disease and minimal antibiotic use gives us confidence that the system is working well. We have welcomed representatives from the RSPCA to the farm, who described it as one of the quietest and most content herds they had seen.”

Grosvenor is now building a biomethane plant on the estate to produce energy from cow manure, in an effort to broaden its revenue streams. From next year the 2.4-hectare facility is expected to generate 72 gigawatts of renewable gas annually from up to 170,000 tonnes of manure, enough to heat about 6,000 homes.

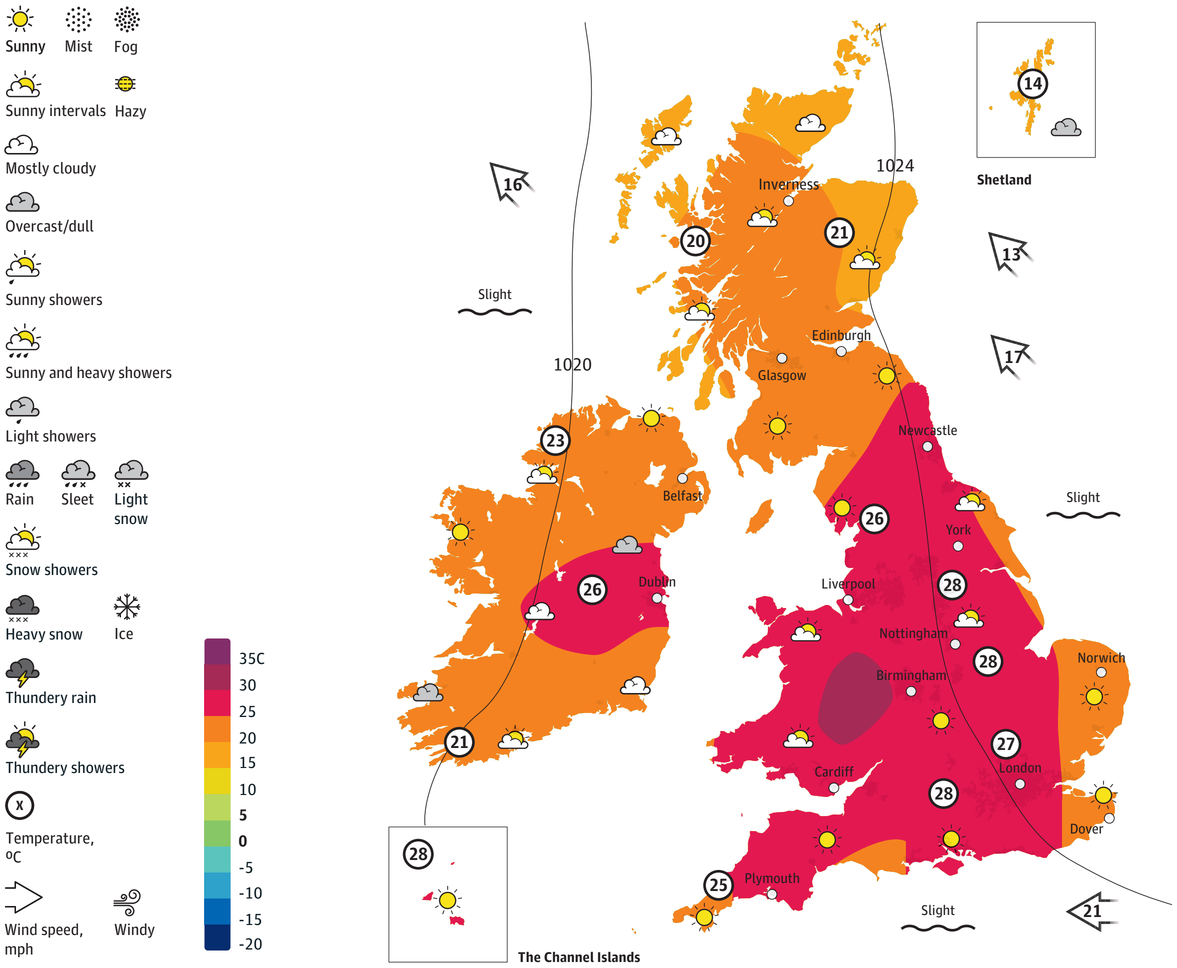
It is not the only such rural family estate to have a reactor. Apsley Farms in Hampshire, which has been owned by the Du Val de Beaulieu family since 1936, operates the UK’s third largest biomethane plant and has been supplying renewable gas to the grid since 2014.

Manure is also used as fertiliser in Grosvenor’s fields, which means more than 80% of the forage fed to the dairy herd is grown without artificial fertilisers. Grosvenor prides itself on circular farming, a system designed to eliminate waste and reuse resources by turning crop waste into feed and animal waste into natural fertiliser, regenerating soil health.

The near-total blockade of the strait of Hormuz during the Iran war has led to global fertiliser shortages, a situation described as a “food security timebomb” by the head of the International Rescue Committee, David Miliband. Preston echoed those concerns, saying in May that the knock-on effects on food prices could arrive next year. “The concerns we raised earlier this year remain very real,” he said. “Ongoing disruption to fertiliser supply chains continues to affect both availability and cost.”

Weather
Tuesday 11 August 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today


Sunny
Mist
Fog
Sunny intervals
Hazy
Mostly cloudy
Overcast/dull
Sunny showers
Sunny and heavy showers
Light showers
Rain
Sleet
Light snow
Snow showers
Heavy snow
Ice
Thundery rain
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Temperature, ºC
Wind speed, mph
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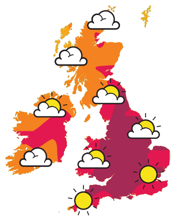
Forecast

Low 14 High 31
Tomorrow



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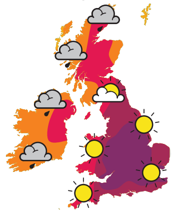
Thursday



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

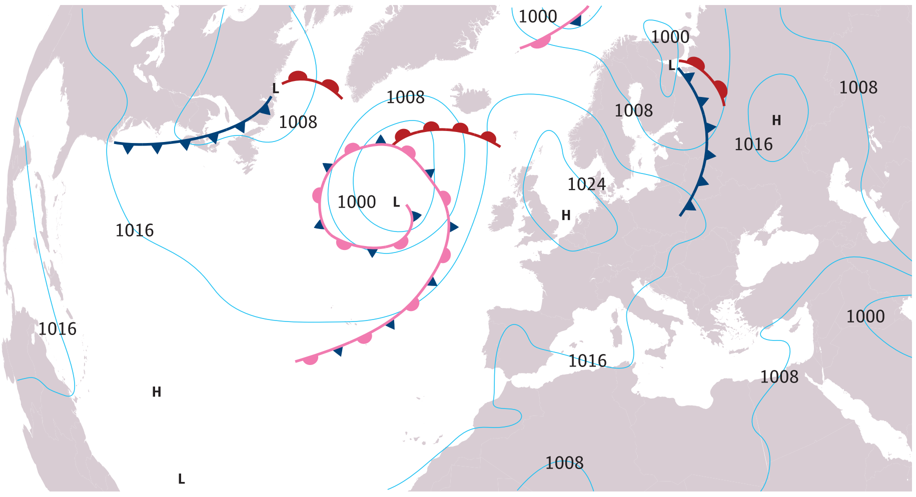
Latest	
08 Aug 2026	427.80
Weekly average	
02 Aug 2026	428.18
10 Aug 2025	425.88
10 Aug 2016	403.57
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs		Precipitation	Air pollution
London	15	27	0%	Low
Manchester	14	28	5%	Low
Edinburgh	12	21	10%	Low
Belfast	15	23	5%	Low
Glasgow	12	23	10%	Low
Inverness	13	20	25%	Low
Leeds	15	28	5%	Moderate
Liverpool	14	28	5%	Low
Newcastle	14	25	5%	Low
Sheffield	14	28	5%	Low

Atlantic front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Cold front
Warm front
Occluded front
Trough

Weather tracker

High pressure has dominated central and eastern Europe, with temperature records broken. Austria recorded a high of 41.2C (106.2F), while Slovakia reached 42.2C. Hungary hit a peak of 41.8C, surpassing a record set in 1905, while overnight temperatures remained above 28C in some areas, marking it as a tropical night.

The temperatures have been driven by a heat dome beneath the high-pressure system, which traps warm air close to the surface.

The heat has created conditions conducive to wildfires. Fires have burned across Italy, France, Serbia and Bulgaria, damaging forests.

Meanwhile, a buoy in the Mediterranean recorded a sea-surface temperature of 33C. If verified, it would be a record.

In eastern Asia, Typhoon Dolphin made landfall in China on Sunday. The national observatory had issued a red alert for prolonged heavy rainfall, high wind speeds and extensive damage. Dolphin has since weakened to a tropical storm.

Japan is braced for Typhoon Chan-hom, expected to make landfall near the coast of Tohoku today or tomorrow, with up to 80mph gusts and an atmospheric pressure of 985 hectopascals.
Magdalena Shopova *MetDesk*

Around the world

Algiers	33	Lisbon	29
Ams'dam	22	Madrid	37
Athens	35	Malaga	32
Auckland	15	Melb'rne	13
B Aires	11	Mexico C	25
Bangkok	32	Miami	34
Barcelona	31	Milan	38
Basra	50	Mombasa	30
Beijing	32	Moscow	25
Berlin	21	Mumbai	29
Bermuda	30	N Orleans	32
Brussels	26	Nairobi	25
Budapest	36	New Delhi	31
C'hagen	20	New York	31
Cairo	40	Oslo	22
Cape Town	20	Paris	32
Chicago	27	Perth	16
Corfu	36	Prague	26
Dakar	32	Reykjavik	16
Dhaka	34	Rio de J	21
Dublin	25	Rome	35
Florence	38	Shanghai	29
Gibraltar	30	Singapore	32
H Kong	36	Stockh'm	17
Harare	24	Strasb'g	32
Helsinki	18	Sydney	22
Istanbul	31	Tel Aviv	33
Jo'burg	5	Tenerife	27
K Lumpur	32	Tokyo	28
K'mandu	30	Toronto	27
Kabul	33	Vancouv'r	22
Kingston	34	Vienna	32
Kolkata	31	Warsaw	22
L Angeles	30	Wash'ton	31
Lagos	28	Well'ton	12
Lima	25	Zurich	33

High tides

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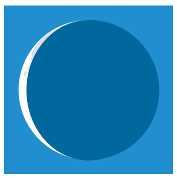
Aberdeen	**--**	--	**1217**	4.1m
Avonmouth	**0546**	11.6m	**1810**	12.3m
Barrow	**1005**	8.5m	**2226**	8.9m
Belfast	**0948**	3.2m	**2200**	3.5m
Cobh	**0348**	3.6m	**1621**	3.9m
Cromer	**0500**	4.7m	**1741**	4.8m
Dover	**0954**	6.2m	**2225**	6.3m
Dublin	**1020**	3.8m	**2233**	4.1m
Galway	**0342**	4.7m	**1602**	5.1m
Greenock	**1122**	3.1m	**2323**	3.3m
Harwich	**1016**	3.7m	**2245**	3.9m
Holyhead	**0905**	5.2m	**2121**	5.5m
Hull	**0437**	6.8m	**1718**	7.1m
Leith	**0051**	5.1m	**1325**	5.3m
Liverpool	**0949**	8.7m	**2210**	9.1m
London Bridge	**--**	--	**1235**	6.4m
Lossiemouth	**1039**	3.9m	**2252**	4.0m
Milford Haven	**0447**	6.3m	**1711**	6.8m
Newquay	**0340**	6.2m	**1604**	6.6m
North Shields	**0144**	4.7m	**1422**	4.8m
Oban	**0455**	3.5m	**1701**	3.8m
Penzance	**0312**	4.9m	**1537**	5.3m
Plymouth	**0418**	4.9m	**1637**	5.3m
Portsmouth	**1008**	4.4m	**2218**	4.5m
Southport	**0911**	8.4m	**2138**	8.8m
Stornoway	**0542**	4.4m	**1756**	4.7m
Portland	**0520**	1.7m	**1734**	2.0m
Whitby	**0218**	5.1m	**1455**	5.3m
Wick	**1009**	3.2m	**2221**	3.4m
Workington	**1012**	7.6m	**2231**	8.0m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0539
Sun sets	2030
Moon rises	0321
Moon sets	2008
New Moon	12 Aug

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2106 to 0555
Birm'ham	2040 to 0545
Brighton	2029 to 0543
Bristol	2041 to 0552
Carlisle	2053 to 0540
Cork	2105 to 0614
Dublin	2102 to 0600
Glasgow	2103 to 0543
Harlech	2051 to 0553
Inverness	2109 to 0535
London	2030 to 0541
M'chester	2046 to 0544
Newcastle	2049 to 0536
Norwich	2029 to 0532
Penzance	2048 to 0607

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Lille midfielder Bouaddi agrees terms with City
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Super Cup
Somalia's Artan back on duty after being barred by US
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Sport

▲ *Demi Vollering's second Tour de France Femmes triumph went down to the wire, in contrast to Tadej Pogacar's procession*
NICOLAS TUCAT/AFP/GETTY

Vollering's victory

Tour de France Femmes steps out of Pogacar's shadow to produce high drama

Jeremy Whittle

Demi Vollering's second overall win in the Tour de France Femmes in Nice on Sunday was achieved after a heated dispute with Kasia Niewiadoma, but by the time the sun was setting on the Promenade des Anglais, the sisterhood that has always characterised this race had kicked back in. On a final stage of high drama, the Dutchwoman erased the lingering controversy with an attacking win of the highest quality, further boosting the prestige of the long-dormant native cycling scene in a gutsy performance from her French-sponsored FDJ United-Suez team.

Niewiadoma's outburst on the finish line at Vollering's teammate Célia Gery on Saturday fuelled the controversy that dominated the final stage, but did not diminish the scale of her 2026, winning the Giro d'Italia Women, Liège-Bastogne-Liège, the Tour of Flanders and Flèche Wallonne. Her achievements this season compare with, and arguably outstrip, those of her men's Tour de France-winning counterpart, Tadej Pogacar.

Vollering has long been outspoken about the wellbeing of young people and reacted angrily to Niewiadoma's public criticism of Gery, her 20-year-old teammate. "She got a lot of nasty messages," Vollering said on Sunday. "It makes me very angry, especially because she's such a young girl. We should protect young people from these kinds of stupid actions."

Vollering and Niewiadoma had a clear-the-air conversation on their bikes during the early kilometres of the final stage on Sunday. "I wanted to have a chat with Kasia because I was a bit disappointed she let all the emotions out like that," she said. "It was good that we had a talk together. It was all good in the end."

The Polish rider, who won the spectacular stage on Mont Ventoux on Friday and finished in the Tour's top three for the fifth time, was equally conciliatory. "We've been competing together for years. None of us ever wants to have any sort of beef."

It was a different story for the unfortunate Marlen Reusser, another key protagonist in the nine-day drama. The Swiss rider, who began the final stage in third place, crashed at speed on the second descent of Col d'Èze. She remounted, in tears, all hopes of the podium lost, but finished the stage.

The men's Tour de France was effectively over as a contest as soon as stage six, when Pogacar won over the Col du Tourmalet, but there was uncertainty about the outcome of the women's race until the final narrow climb of the Chemin de Vinaigrier, in suburban Nice. Pogacar will go to Edinburgh for the Grand Départ on 2 July next year seeking a sixth win, but it is uncertain if Jonas Vingegaard will remain his greatest rival. While Pogacar has confirmed he will race in the Vuelta a España, starting in Monaco on 22 August, Vingegaard's future remains unclear.

Mattias Skjelmose, a fellow Dane, has revealed Vingegaard, who crashed out of the Tour with a broken collarbone, has become disheartened by Pogacar's domination. "Jonas says: 'I can't do any more. What am I supposed to do? I produce the best I've ever done and he just rides away from me,'" Skjelmose told a Danish podcast.

Vingegaard's crash came hours after he was subjected to a 2am visit by drug testers from the International Testing Agency. The debate over the appropriateness of such extreme anti-doping measures dominated the rest of the Tour. Pogacar rode on to Paris, apparently untroubled by his own 5am wake-up call, but the UCI's president, David Lappartient, said: "There will always be suspicion in cycling."

The men's Tour throws up the biggest stars but in the era of Pogacar it is the Tour de France Femmes that offers the most compelling racing. "When you have a Tadej Pogacar, at such a high level, you're talking more about second place," the Tour de France Femmes director, Marion Rousse, said. "It's not like that in the women's race. Women's cycling creates more suspense than you see in men's cycling, because Pogacar is so dominant."

> *'Women's cycling creates more suspense than you see in men's cycling, because Pogacar is so dominant'*

The refreshing nature of the Tour de France Femmes remains intact even as it grows at a rapid pace. Pogacar, a constant advocate of the women's peloton, seems enthralled. He was spotted at the roadside, in beanie hat and shades, during the stage to Mont Ventoux on Friday, running alongside and cheering on his partner, Urska Zigart, and was present again at the weekend in Nice.

Rousse believes the women's race, which will hold its Grand Départ in Leeds on 30 July next year before stage finishes in Manchester, Sheffield and London, has not lost its innocence. "There's a freshness, which you don't get in men's racing," she said. "Women's sport is more accessible. I think it's because before, during the years before women's cycling had profile, there was little '*mediatisation*' of women's racing. Now they see the media coverage, they see so many people come to watch. They're moved and every time, on the podium, there's lots of emotion. That's a new experience."

Rousse said the sceptics who doubted the quality of the women's peloton have been silenced. "Back then it was all: 'Are the women good enough? Can they do the big climbs?' Now it's: 'Why don't you have more stages? Why isn't it every stage shown live on TV?' Nobody asks if the women are good enough any more. They have proved themselves, they're champions who have shown that they deserve their place."

‘I knew the impact I could have if I got that gold medal’

Portrait by Jill Mead/The Guardian

The big interview

Audley Harrison

The 2000 Olympic super-heavyweight champion always craved gold, but he also dreamed of changing British boxing for better

Donald McRae

‘I was the Olympic champion, and I was the next big thing, but the system had to win,” Audley Harrison says as he reflects on his rise and fall as a fighter who changed so much in British boxing while failing to fulfil his grandest ambitions in the ring. Harrison had once been considered a likely successor to Lennox Lewis, the undisputed world heavyweight champion, but he became a figure of ridicule mocked as “Fraudley Harrison”.

He retired in 2013 with a modest 31-7 record and having never come close to winning the world title many thought would be his inevitable glory when he took gold at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. But Harrison dragged British boxing fleetingly into the mainstream and ripped up the old traditions of the fight game by managing and promoting himself.

Now, aged 54 and briefly back in London from his permanent home in Los Angeles, Harrison is as garrulous as ever while bringing a calm acceptance to his reflections on one of the strangest stories in British boxing history. He also sounds free of bitterness.

“The system cannot let an individual turn over the applecart. I understand that now so there are no hard feelings,” he says. “I was a rogue agent and they did what they had to do to protect their system.”

For Harrison, “they” consists of the BBC and the boxing business run by promoters and managers. In his version of events, the BBC fell hard for him after the Sydney Olympics and paid him well over £1m to restore boxing to terrestrial television before they became disenchanted when his career stuttered and he would not cede control to their preferred promoters.

‘The system cannot let an individual turn over the applecart. I now understand that’

According to Harrison: “when me and Kellie Maloney [the former manager and promoter] were in the Celebrity Big Brother House [in 2014] she told me: ‘We were out to get you. You couldn’t make it because you’re just the boxer.’ It was a coordinated campaign.”

Maloney confirmed the veracity of Harrison’s account. “Audley wanted to change the face of boxing. So we had a coffee and a chat with his first opponent [Mike Middleton in May 2001]. He was an American and we went to his hotel in Wembley and persuaded him that if he allowed our lawyer to represent him we would get him more money.

“We made sure that he ended up getting double what Audley and the BBC had agreed to pay him. It was a good lesson for Audley.”

It is also important to acknowledge how much positive change Harrison brought to boxing. “A lot of people don’t know this, but, in 1998, I set up the Amateur Boxing Union and launched this campaign,” he says. “We did this petition and marched to parliament. I’d done my own press releases and we were on television and in the newspapers.

“Tony Banks was the sports minister and when we got to his office he let me in. I had a stack of petition signatures and he said: ‘I’ve heard about your amazing work. What do you need?’ I said we need £500k to get a full squad to the Commonwealth Games. [Banks] gave it to us and we were able to train fully and we won four golds and that allowed us to have a team of 12 boxers try to qualify for the Olympics.”

Harrison was one of those gold medal winners, but he was driven by the Olympics. “British boxing didn’t have the money and that’s why we hadn’t won [an Olympic] gold medal since 1968, with Chris Finnegan. I knew the impact and the leverage I could have, and boxing could have, if I won that gold medal.”

Harrison achieved his dream and he says: “It changed my life and it changed [British] boxing because of the money that was put into the sport. That gold medal kickstarted the world-class programme you see today. From there we had Amir Khan in 2004, and in 2008 you had gold from James DeGale.

“That brought in more money and then 2012 and Anthony Joshua really kicked off. But if I didn’t win the first gold medal, there would have been none of that money.”

Harrison says: “I’d captured the public imagination and ended up creating something unprecedented. I wanted to be independent [by setting up A-Force Promotions]. Greg Dyke made that become a reality because he was the BBC’s director general and a boxing fan.”

Injury and inexperience blighted the first 10 fights of his BBC contract. He won them all without producing any fireworks. “It was a learning curve, but I got crucified,” Harrison says. “Greg Dyke said: ‘Listen, we just care about the viewing figures.’ But the product wasn’t there because I’m an amateur turning professional and I’m headlining. They said: ‘You can’t have someone else headlining because all the grandmas know you.’”

Harrison points out that “I was getting 2.2 million watching my fights on average”, but after his 11th straight win, against Mathew Ellis [in May 2003], a brawl broke out at ringside. “That was the nail in the coffin. They were saying: ‘Audley, you have to be controlled.’

“The BBC wanted me to give up my company and just become a boxer and sign with Mick Hennessy or Dennis Hobson as my promoters.”

Audley Harrison won super-heavyweight gold at the 2000 Olympics

> ***‘Boom. Next thing I think I’m having a heart attack outside the press conference’***

When he refused he “got exiled to America. The BBC said: ‘We’ll give you a three-fight deal but it cannot be on UK soil.’”

Harrison retained his independence and, with real ingenuity, went to the US and struck a separate three-fight deal with ESPN while retaining his links with the BBC. Peter Salmon, the corporation’s head of sport, then extended the deal by another three fights, to be held in the UK, with the proviso that Harrison scaled back his promotional duties.

“But in January 2004, Greg Dyke left the BBC,” he says. “Now, for the anti-boxing brigade within the BBC, Public Enemy No 1 was Mr Audley Harrison.

“They chose Julius Francis for the second fight and I said: ‘Listen, I go out partying with Julius and boxed him as an amateur. He’s not the right fight.’ It was a 12-round bore, horrible, until I knocked him down in the last round. Who got crucified? I did.”

Harrison boxed three times from March to June 2004. “Tomasz Bonin was the last one and I hadn’t slept properly for three months doing these fights back-to-back, doing these crazy negotiations with the BBC.

“On the Sunday there was a full-page article in the News of the World: ‘Audley goes to Sky in shock deal’. We’re like: ‘What the hell? We’re not even talking to Sky.’”

It emerged later that Harrison and Salmon were among the public figures whose phones had been hacked by the Mirror group of newspapers.

“On the Tuesday I had a meeting with Salmon to sign a new deal. But when I arrived he said: ‘That’s it. This is your last fight for us and there will be no more professional boxing on the BBC after Saturday.’”

Harrison shared the crushing news at a press conference on the Thursday and then: “Boom. Next thing I think I’m having a heart attack outside the press conference. I’m taken to hospital and a doctor said: ‘You’re not having a heart attack, but when did you last sleep?’ I said: ‘I haven’t slept much for four days.’ He said: ‘You’re in no condition to box on Saturday.’ But I had to.

“The next day my brother drove me to the weigh in. I had a full-on breakdown in the car. I thought I was dying. I was screaming, flailing my arms. I was deranged for a while, but when I got to the venue I calmed down. I put my hood on and did everything to hold it together.”

▶ *Audley Harrison was stopped in three rounds while barely throwing a punch against David Haye in November 2010*
JON SUPER/AP

Harrison stopped Bonin in round nine. “I got the job done, but they took away my glory again. I’d hurt him, but they stopped the fight prematurely.”

He had to wait three days before returning to the US and Harrison says he spent most of that time in a darkened room. “I felt like Superman had left the building and Clark Kent is never going to be a world champion. That guy I’d been – A-Force, Superman – left the building in the back of that car.”

Harrison won his next two fights, in the US and his record was 19-0 when he lost a split-decision to Danny Williams in December 2005. Dominick Guinn beat him in his next bout and the world title dream was gone.

Harrison won 12 more fights, but he also lost another five. Defeat to David Haye in November 2010, when he was stopped in three rounds while barely throwing a punch, was embarrassing. But he talks philosophically in a corner of the BuddhaBox gym in Mayfair: “I had to learn these lessons because if I’d stayed on that pathway I’d be dead and gone now. I’m fortunate I got a second chance. My boxing career went to shit, but Clark Kent grew up.”

Harrison has lived in LA for years and he and his wife, Raychel, run a successful hair salon and beauty products business. “I’ve got a beautiful wife and house, two kids, and I’ve got substance, which I wouldn’t have if those things hadn’t happened.”

People are curious about him again. “I flew in for Wardley-Dubois [in Manchester in May] and it didn’t stop all night: ‘Audley, can we get your picture?’ It was like the Olympics again.”

He saw a brutal fight and Harrison says: “No disrespect to Wardley, but he came from white collar boxing and won an IBF title. That shows me how bad boxing is technically and tactically. But I was encouraged by Dubois. He’s developing those boxing fundamentals.”

What does he think of Moses Itauma, Britain’s new heavyweight sensation? “He looks good, but his last fight was against [Jermaine] Franklin, a gatekeeper. I need to see him go through the gears at a higher level.”

Did he watch Joshua’s recent fight against Kristian Prenga when the unheralded Albanian knocked him down twice in the first round? “Yes, Father Time is undefeated. The other day I watched a [2018] fight between Joshua and [Alexander] Povetkin. Povetkin’s a nasty puncher, but Joshua absorbed those shots and came back with a lovely finish. He’s lost that punch resistance, but he’s still AJ and coming for you.

“The Tyson Fury that boxed Deontay Wilder in those great fights, and the second one was so incredible it gave me an orgasm, is also not the same. Those hard fights take so much away from you. They’ll make Fury the favourite, but AJ will fight with real intensity against him. Fury has underestimated him and, unless he switches on, he’s going to be in trouble.”

Is Harrison really interested in that overhyped bout? “Big time. When Mike Tyson fought Lennox Lewis people were like: ‘It’s a horrible fight. It’s too late.’ But Lennox was in there cracking and Tyson was trying to land those big shots. Fury and AJ will be like that. It’s going to be something we’ll remember.”

Would Harrison like to return to boxing? “Yes. I’ve got my manager’s licence in America. The knowledge I have as a trainer, a manager and a matchmaker is unique and at the highest level. I’m not bragging, but the education I got is all in my head, waiting for somebody.”

Boxing is a dirty business and Harrison says: “It’s so unscrupulous and so dysfunctional and that’s why I’ve been happy to be out. But when I’m dead and gone, I can’t give this knowledge to nobody. I know I can develop an Olympic champion and a world champion so it would be a shame not to share it.”

Newcastle’s Nobbs has promotion on her wishlist

Tom Garry

Jordan Nobbs says winning promotion to the Women’s Super League with Newcastle would fulfil her ambition for a north-east club to be in the top tier.

Nobbs, who has 71 England caps, was born in Stockton-on-Tees and believes women’s football in the region would benefit from top-flight representation. Newcastle finished sixth in WSL2 last season, 11 points behind the title winners, Birmingham, and nine points off the playoffs, but this summer they have made high-calibre signings from the top division, including the striker Martha Thomas from Tottenham and the Liverpool duo Leanne Kiernan and Gemma Evans.

Nobbs is clear about the target for the new campaign. “It is promotion. I know we said it last season [too],” she said. “I’ve always said things don’t happen overnight, [but] that is our goal. You have to say it out loud.

“Looking back on last season, we had some really good performances but nine draws, that’s too many points [dropped]. It’s about focusing on finding a way to win. We’ve just got to build on the good stuff from last season, I don’t think we’re far off it.

▲ *Jordan Nobbs wants a team from the north-east in the WSL*

“[Winning promotion with Newcastle], I’ve always said it would be job done. In the WSL, I’d ticked as much as I could, so to get a north-east team, which we all had to leave back in the day, promoted would be an achievement I would love.”

Nobbs began her career with Sunderland and broke into their team in the old top flight, but moved to Arsenal when the WSL was launched in 2011 and Sunderland’s application to join the breakaway division was rejected. That led to a successful team also including Nobbs’s future England teammates Lucy Bronze and Lucy Staniforth breaking up.

Sunderland did compete in the top tier between 2015 and 2018, but north-east representation in the WSL has been sparse, so Nobbs is pleased to see investment at Newcastle as well as their WSL2 rivals, who were taken over in June by Bay Collective.

“It’s been a long time coming, but it was something us northerners have always wanted. We don’t want the north-east to fizzle out. It’s grown in the right direction now. But the big stepping stone would be getting into the WSL. I’d love to be a part of that.”

Nobbs has enjoyed her role in Tanya Oxtoby’s setup at Newcastle after joining last July. “With Villa I played a lot of a deeper role and [now] I love being back in my high position.”

Football In brief

Carabao Cup

Luton handed tough tie away to Chelsea

Five-time winners Chelsea have been handed a home draw against League One Luton in the second round of the Carabao Cup, due to take place in the week beginning 24 August. Chelsea’s new manager, Xabi Alonso, will begin the club’s bid to win the competition for the first time since 2015 later this month. Fellow Premier League side Tottenham have also benefited from a home draw, against Championship opponents Charlton. Fulham host League One AFC Wimbledon, Brentford have a potentially tricky away day at second-tier Birmingham while newly promoted Ipswich host Leicester. In the northern section, the headline fixture features last season’s Europa League semi-finalists Nottingham Forest hosting fellow top-flight opposition in Leeds. Newcastle’s new head coach, Matthias Jaissle, has been given a home draw against West Brom while the Everton manager, David Moyes, will return to Preston, where he was a player and manager. **PA Media**

Northern section: Barnsley v Crewe, Blackburn v Sheffield Utd, Blackpool v Lincoln City, Bradford City v Burnley, Doncaster v Middlesbrough, Fleetwood v Shrewsbury, Newcastle v West Brom, Nottingham Forest v Leeds, Preston v Everton, Sheffield Wednesday v Wolves, Stoke v Hull.
Southern section: Birmingham v Brentford, Cambridge Utd v Millwall, Cardiff v Norwich, Chelsea v Luton, Fulham v AFC Wimbledon, Ipswich v Leicester, Plymouth v Coventry, Southampton v West Ham, Stevenage v Reading, Tottenham vs Charlton, Walsall v Leyton Orient, Watford v Peterborough Utd.

Derby

Rams not for sale after Lion Sport ditch deal

Derby have confirmed discussions with Turki Alalshikh’s Lion Sport to buy a controlling interest in the Championship outfit will no longer proceed and that the club is now off the market. The purchase process had been sanctioned by the Independent Football Regulator and the EFL, notification of which the Rams received last week. But Derby said in a statement last night: “Today the club received notice that Lion Sport no longer wanted to continue with the purchase. For the benefit of any doubt, the club is now off the market.” Saudi government official and boxing promoter Alalshikh said: “After careful consideration, we don’t feel it is right to proceed at this time” **PA Media**

Forest owner Marinakis sues Crystal Palace over fan banner

Ed Aarons

Evangelos Marinakis, the Nottingham Forest owner, is suing Crystal Palace for defamation after supporters of the south London club displayed a banner depicting him holding a gun to the head of the England midfielder Morgan Gibbs-White.

Almost 12 months since the banner appeared in the first half of Palace's 1-1 draw with Forest at Selhurst Park, lawyers for Marinakis lodged the claim for defamation against CPFC Ltd and "persons unknown" at the high court yesterday.

The banner showed the Greek shipping magnate pointing the gun at Gibbs-White, who had been set to join Tottenham last summer before Forest pulled out of the deal, and also featured the message: "Mr Marinakis is not involved in blackmail, match-fixing, drug trafficking or corruption." Marinakis has previously rejected all those allegations. Lawyers for Marinakis were approached for comment. A spokesperson for Palace did not comment.

▲ *Lawyers for Evangelos Marinakis have lodged a defamation claim*

Palace were fined £50,000 by the Football Association in February after being found guilty of failing "to ensure its spectators and/or supporters (and anyone purporting to be supporters or followers) didn't behave in an improper, offensive, abusive, insulting and/or provocative way at this match". The FA added in its statement: "The fact Crystal Palace had a policy to prevent banners being smuggled into the stadium demonstrates that it was aware of the risk."

Last summer, Palace and Forest were at loggerheads after Forest wrote to Uefa to voice their concerns that Palace could be in breach of multi-club ownership rules. The FA Cup winners ended up being demoted to the Conference League, with Forest – who had finished seventh in the Premier League and originally qualified for the Conference League – promoted in their place. Palace went on to win that competition under Oliver Glasner, while Forest reached the Europa League semi-finals.

Glasner has since joined Forest after leaving Palace at the end of his contract. The Austrian said this week that Marinakis had persuaded him to change his mind over dinner in Athens after previously rejecting Forest because they were not in Europe next season. Palace are due to face Forest at Selhurst Park in the Premier League on 10 October.

Van Dijk eyes more quality as Liverpool sign Araújo on loan

Dominic Booth

Virgil van Dijk is ready to welcome Ronald Araújo as his new centre-back partner at Liverpool with the loan deal to sign the Barcelona defender completed yesterday.

Araújo arrives on a one-season contract and has played at right-back, a vulnerable area of Liverpool's squad as Conor Bradley continues his rehabilitation from a serious knee injury and with Jeremie Frimpong still to nail down a first-XI spot after a disrupted first season at Anfield.

On Sunday Van Dijk played almost an hour in his first pre-season appearance as Liverpool were beaten 3-2 by Monaco at home, having led 2-0. The Dutchman fouled Aleksandr Golovin just before the break to concede a penalty, which Golovin scored.

Jérémy Jacquet remained absent, Liverpool's £50m arrival being treated with kid gloves after an injury-hit spell last season with Rennes.

"I can't wait to get started," Araújo, who has 27 Uruguay caps, told the Liverpool website. "I think it was a move that was necessary for me. As soon as I heard of interest from Liverpool, everything went into action quickly. I'm super-happy to be here."

Van Dijk said of Araújo: "Any player that arrives at the club we will be welcoming."

The captain was upbeat about Jacquet and the prospect of more transfer activity before the deadline on 1 September. Liverpool are keen to add to their forward line with Paris Saint-Germain's Bradley Barcola of interest.

Van Dijk said: "Any quality we can add to the team will definitely be welcome so let's see." He said of Jacquet: "I've not seen any of him. I've spoken to him. I've seen him walking around and we have conversations. I can't wait to see him back on the pitch and I hope that happens very soon."

Van Dijk revealed he has been in regular contact with Andoni Iraola, offering full support to the new head coach. "The main thing for him to know is I am here for him, anything he needs, wants to know, wants me to do for the team or whatever. Hopefully we will be successful this season."

▲ *Ronald Araújo heads to Anfield to bolster Liverpool's depleted defence*

▼ *Ayyoub Bouaddi impressed for Morocco at this summer's World Cup*
MAURO PIMENTEL/AFP/GETTY

City poised to seal £85m move for Lille's Bouaddi

Morocco midfielder's signing expected to clear path for Rodri to join Barcelona

Jamie Jackson

Manchester City are closing in on signing Ayyoub Bouaddi from Lille, with his expected arrival clearing the path for Rodri to join Barcelona. The 18-year-old midfielder has agreed personal terms with City, but the club are still finalising the deal with Lille who value him at €100m (£85m).

City's new manager, Enzo Maresca, wants to integrate the Morocco international into his first-team squad immediately. City meet Arsenal in the Community Shield on Sunday and start their Premier League campaign against Bournemouth on 23 August.

Barcelona are confident of signing Rodri from City, but they will have to return with an improved offer after an initial €45m bid was rejected last week. The sale of Ferran Torres, who is of interest to Paris Saint-Germain, would finance Rodri's purchase. City are all but resigned to the sale of the 30-year-old, who has a year left on his contract.

If the Bouaddi deal can be completed, he would join Elliot Anderson, who arrived last month from Nottingham Forest for £116m, in a new-look midfield, which has lost the experience of Bernardo Silva.

Manchester United, meanwhile, are interested in the Leicester player Louis Page. United, who face competition from Arsenal, are hopeful of securing a deal for the 18-year-old midfielder, with Page believed to favour a transfer to Old Trafford.

Marcus Rashford has joined United at their County Kildare training camp following the England forward's post-World Cup break. The 28-year-old has spent the past season and a half on loan at Barcelona and Aston Villa respectively, in the aftermath of a breakdown in his relationship with the club executive and the former United head coach Ruben Amorim. Relations have now eased and Rashford is focused on working under the United manager, Michael Carrick, although he could still leave before the end of the transfer window.

Arsenal look for defensive cover with Saliba and Timber sidelined

Ed Aarons

Arsenal are stepping up their efforts to sign defensive cover for William Saliba after Mikel Arteta revealed that Jurriën Timber is well away from returning to competitive action. Saliba will be out for an extended period after breaking down during the World Cup with a back injury.

After Arsenal lost a second successive friendly when Borussia Dortmund won 3-2 on Sunday to lift the Emirates Cup in a performance that featured several defensive mistakes, Arteta would not be drawn on when the France defender is expected to return, but said it would take "some time to heal".

There are also concerns over Timber, who pulled out of the Netherlands squad on the eve of the World Cup after failing to recover from a persistent groin injury that forced him to miss most of the run-in last season.

"Jurriën is progressing really well," Arteta said. "He's on the pitch, he's doing quite a lot right now, but it's still weeks away. I cannot tell you how much. William Saliba is in rest mode at the moment for two weeks. He had to do almost nothing, an aggravated injury, so it's going to take some time to heal."

Pressed on how Arsenal will cope without Saliba, he said: "We have experienced that in the past, unfortunately. When he's been available, he's hit home and the stats are incredible. We know we lost a massive player, the same with Jurriën."

▲ *Arsenal are expected to make a fresh bid for Aston Villa's Ezri Konsa*

Arsenal have had a bid for Aston Villa's Ezri Konsa rejected and are expected to return with a new offer for the England centre-back, who is also capable of playing at right-back. Villa value him at £60m, but with less than two years left on his contract Arsenal are unwilling to pay that much for the 28-year-old. The Gunners have also shown an interest in signing Cristian Romero from Tottenham, but any move for the Argentina defender is unlikely given Spurs' reluctance to sell to their north London rivals.

Arteta, who started against Dortmund with Cristhian Mosquera in central defence alongside Gabriel Magalhães, said Arsenal's existing players must get up to speed before the Community Shield against Manchester City on Sunday, but did not rule out bringing in another defender.

"It has to be the right player in the market to make us much better," he said. "We conceded some poor goals today, in the way we competed especially. But that's a collective responsibility. So we need to improve with the players we have."

On other pages **Mourinho**
Phil Harrison reviews the Netflix documentary series *G2, page 10* →

League Two preview
Salford pinning their hopes on Langstaff

Last season's beaten playoff finalists lead the promotion candidates, while relegated Rotherham look intriguing under Steve McClaren and Alex Bruce, writes **Will Unwin**

Contenders

Salford meekly lost the playoff final and that was the end of days for Karl Robinson as he was sacked. Peter Cklamovski was not the obvious replacement, but the Australian left behind the Malaysia national side for a crack at League Two with the rebranded Ammies, who are back in their traditional orange. Macaulay Langstaff has arrived with the task of providing the goals to finally get Salford up and few would bet against the striker.

Chesterfield fell short in the playoffs, too, but Paul Cook remains one of the best managers at this level, although the loss of Armando Dobra could be significant. Securing the veteran forward Andy Cook was important for **Grimsby** as they seek to push on and his influence could be telling if he plays enough games. Lee Grant did not get much chance to prove himself at Huddersfield so will be desperate to do so at **Walsall**, especially after a promising start by knocking Championship side Bristol City out of the EFL Cup. The former goalkeeper will be hoping he is the man to ensure the Saddlers do not stop playing in winter, as has been the case in recent years.

Of those who have dropped down, **Rotherham** are the more intriguing bet, having brought in Steve McClaren as director of football and Alex Bruce as head coach in an attempt to revitalise the club. Losing Sam Nombe was a blow, but his transfer fee should allow investment. Jon Brady knows what he is doing and could do nothing to keep **Port Vale** up, but arguably has the most complete squad at this level with Max Watters and Kyle Dempsey standout summer signings.

Hopefuls

An end-of-season slump kept **Crewe** out of the playoffs last time round, but the returns of Luke Offord and Joe White provide much-needed quality. **Barnet** were two points off eighth having returned to the EFL and have kept their developing squad together - apart from Ryan Glover who was sold to Stockport - to give Dean Brennan real belief that his side can improve. **Oldham** made a steady return to the fourth tier and have added the guarantee of Elliott Nevitt's goals alongside Oliver Norburn, who was a key member of the Notts County side that went up from this division.

Colin Kazim-Richards has his feet fully under the table at **Crawley** and has overseen one of their traditional busy summers in an attempt to avoid a relegation battle. The former Sunderland goalkeeper Vito Mannone was an eye-catching signing, while the talented Malcolm Ebiowei will be aiming to turn his career around. If these two shine, it could make them a surprise package. Relegation and problems off the pitch have put **Exeter** on a downward spiral, which does not look like being arrested without further incomings. "Absolute tinpoint garbage" was Ian Holloway's view of **Swindon**'s friendly performance against Bristol City, which suggests the team still have levels to go. Gareth Ainsworth wants high-pressing **Gillingham** to maintain energy levels over the course of the campaign to give them an outside chance of challenging.

George Burley's son-in-law Chris Hogg joined **Northampton** in May for his first managerial role and, after sunning himself in Greece, is primed to test himself, but the Cobblers may rue the departure of Cameron McGeehan as they aim to rebuild after relegation. Gavin Cowan transformed **Shrewsbury** from no-hopers to comfortably staying up but he faces a tricky second album.

John Terry is not the **Colchester** owner, as the sale of the club rumbles on without a solution. Steve Evans will ensure **Bristol Rovers** are competitive, but whether that means they can push themselves higher than 14th place last season remains to be seen.

Strugglers

The promoted teams start on the backfoot after managerial changes, as **Rochdale** lost Jimmy McNulty, while **York** decided to sack Stuart Maynard midway through preseason, much to the consternation of the fans. Diligence in recruitment, however, gives them optimism, especially Dale bringing back Cian Hayes.

Tranmere survived by a couple of points last time round but will be hoping for an uplift under Darrell Clarke, who has persuaded Will Vaulks and the former Watford winger Tom Ince that Prenton Park is a sensible place to continue their careers. **Newport County** also were forced into a change in the dugout when Christian Fuchs decided Rodney Parade was not the place he wanted to call home having kept the team up, leaving the club in flux as Chris Todd oversaw preparations for the campaign. The Exiles brought in plenty of experience in the shape of Harrison Biggins and Christian Doidge to strengthen the squad.

The inexperienced Matt Lawlor is set for a challenging first full season in charge of **Fleetwood**, who were boosted by the signing of Andy Cannon from Wrexham. Steve Cotterill revitalised **Cheltenham** almost a year ago, but five of their first six summer signings were relegated in May, which does not inspire confidence. After finishing comfortably in midtable, **Accrington Stanley** may not fear the drop and Cole Stockton is a clever signing but there is a nagging doubt about the club's efficacy.

Saturday's opening games (3pm unless stated)
Accrington Stanley v Colchester, Barnet v Salford, Cheltenham v Rotherham, Chesterfield v Fleetwood, Crawley v Crewe, Gillingham v Walsall, Grimsby v Exeter, Newport County v Rochdale (12.30pm), Northampton v Swindon, Oldham v Port Vale (12.30pm), Tranmere v Shrewsbury, York v Bristol Rovers

Contender
Peter Cklamovski
Salford
Hopeful
Colin Kazim-Richards
Crawley
Contender
Alex Bruce
Rotherham

Artan 'very happy' with Super Cup opportunity

Ben Fisher

The Somali referee Omar Artan, who was refused entry to the US to officiate at the World Cup, has spoken publicly for the first time about the decision and detailed his pride as he prepares to take charge of the Super Cup match between Paris Saint-Germain and Aston Villa tomorrow. Uefa awarded the 34-year-old Artan the game a few days after he was prevented from working at the tournament.

Artan will make history in Salzburg as the first non-European official to take charge of Uefa's annual competition between the respective winners of the Champions League and the Europa League. "When we got this call it was, for me and my family, really a very, very happy moment," he said. "There's a big Somali community in Europe and in Austria and they are over the moon with me officiating a match like this."

Artan found himself at the centre of controversy after being denied entry at Miami international airport on 6 June. The Fifa president, Gianni Infantino, suggested he was powerless to overrule Donald Trump's administration. Somalia is one of 12 countries on a travel ban list introduced last year by the US.

"It was a tough period," Artan said. "A lot of people have sympathy for me because when someone has been working a lot of years and is supposed to do something, and then can't do it, it's very challenging. I really appreciate the support I received throughout the world; I'm so grateful."

Artan has prepared for the match at the Red Bull Arena by taking charge of league games in Somalia and the Kuwaiti Premier League. "We referees go through a lot of preparation in terms of getting to know the teams," he said in an interview with Uefa. "I always watch the teams play. I like watching European football anyway but, regardless, I go through and do a lot of research on the teams, how they play, learn their behaviours, tactics."

Artan will be assisted by two more African officials, Liban Abdoulrazack Ahmed (Djibouti) and Stephen Eleazar Onyango Yiembe (Kenya).

▲ *Omar Artan was on the World Cup roster but was denied entry to the US*

Fifa's plan for World Cup sale a 'fundamental breach of trust'

Continued *from back page*

scheme. "It treats this as a failure of communication, when what football witnessed was a failure of judgment," the letter says. "It did not acknowledge that the proposal itself was inherently wrong. There remains no recognition that attempting to sell an interest in the Fifa World Cup was a profound failure of judgment - not just a procedural misstep, but a fundamental breach of trust with the very institutions Fifa exists to serve."

The three presidents also call for an independent review into the affair. Fifa had committed previously to presenting a full report to the Fifa Council at its next scheduled meeting. The letter addresses concerns that countries may lose out on financial aid under a different leadership, saying it is "[not] about any member association losing the support it has earned, despite the fearmongering directed at our leadership to suggest otherwise".

The letter concludes: "There is silence where there should be accountability, distance where there should be openness … Football's strength has always been its unity. We call for that unity to be honoured now, with leadership that serves football, not seeks to command it."

Any candidates for the Fifa election must announce their bid by 18 November. The confederations are understood to consider all options in their push for Infantino to be replaced, provided they fit within Fifa's statutes and governance framework.

While the letter outlines the stances of the three confederations, and particularly their leaderships, the story is more complicated within individual member associations. Few outside Europe have been willing to come out publicly against Infantino and only a small minority have been tempted to recall the letters of support they had sent backing his re-election next March. The African and South American confederations, Caf and Conmebol, have come out backing Infantino in recent days.

A number of larger member associations have written to Infantino asking for a meeting where he would be required to explain his actions around the FFE scheme. No response has been received. Nor has he been in touch with federations to address his leading role in the turmoil.

The confederations' tripartite statement was followed by another joint release headed by the World Cup hosts US Soccer and Canada Soccer, who along with the Caribbean Football Union and Central American Football Union also called for governance change at Fifa.

The four bodies comprise 40 of the 41 Concacaf members, with the outliers being the third World Cup hosts Mexico, who went public last Friday with their support for Infantino. US Soccer had been silent and its willingness to condemn Fifa is significant: it is bidding to host the 2031 Women's World Cup and also wants to stage games at the 2029 Club World Cup.

Hunt lights up opening night and sets sights on clean sweep of golds

British sprinter targets three more titles after surging to a sensational victory in 100m

Sean Ingle
Alexander Stadium

After a display of icy resolve and sustained power had secured Amy Hunt a European 100m gold medal, Britain's new sprint queen reached for a Freddie Mercury lyric. "I want it all," she said, before peering into a golden future.

The Cambridge graduate, 24, now plans to leave the European Championships with four gold medals, adding the 200m and 4x100m women's and mixed relays to her 100m title. On this evidence, would you dare bet against her?

Hunt is never the quickest starter. In truth, she reacted to the gun like a woman whose spikes had been superglued to her blocks and she was still behind with 30m to go before coming through to take her first major title in 11.00sec.

"I've probably had much worse starts than that," Hunt said. "The biggest thing is not panicking, trusting in my very, very long legs, long femurs, and just staying calm and pulling through at the end.

"'Trash' is probably going to be his [her coach, Marco Airale] words about my start," she said. "And maybe a little bit of Italian blasphemy, but we came through at the end. One of my biggest skills in terms of championships is I know I'm so strong in the end and I always have that kind of extra magic in the last 40, 50m."

Ewa Swoboda of Poland secured silver in 11.02, while Delphine Nkansa took bronze for Belgium in 11.06.

"Honestly, it's just euphoria," said Hunt. "My first gold. I think it was definitely time to upgrade. This was definitely a coming of age for me. I'm someone that thrives under that pressure, so the stage for the final isn't intimidating to me. I just knew I had to stay calm and not overthink myself into the gold before I had it in my grasp."

It was also vindication after being beaten into silver at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow a fortnight ago. "It really came in handy for me," she said. "I wanted to have that experience of being in front of a home crowd and having that meta-expectation, because I've never had that. I took a lot of learnings from Glasgow and it really helped me.

Hunt's story loses little in its retelling. She was the world's fastest woman over 200m at 18, then had a series of injuries that got so bad some questioned whether she would ever fulfil her potential. A few years ago she ruptured one of her quadriceps so badly that her mum needed to lift her out of the shower.

When she won a 200m silver medal in Tokyo last year, she called herself a "track goddess and an academic badass". "I don't know if I have any more one-liners in me," she said. Then came the Freddie Mercury line.

Hunt later revealed she had a premonition that she was going to win gold. "I just had such a magical feeling," she said. "I've won English Schools here. I've raced here as 13-14-year-old. So, this is really my track. I'm a girl from Newark, I'm a Midlands girl. So I just had a feeling that this was going to be my night."

Hunt insisted that this could be just the start as she now chases an historic four gold medals. "I want to

Today at the Euros

Keely Hodgkinson (📷) begins the defence of her women's 800m title at 12.05pm. The big event of the night is the men's 100m, where Italian Marcell Jacobs is the favourite to defend his crown (the final is at 9.45pm), with Britain's Romell Glave his closest challenger. The women's 110m hurdles (9.30pm) should also be a cracker.

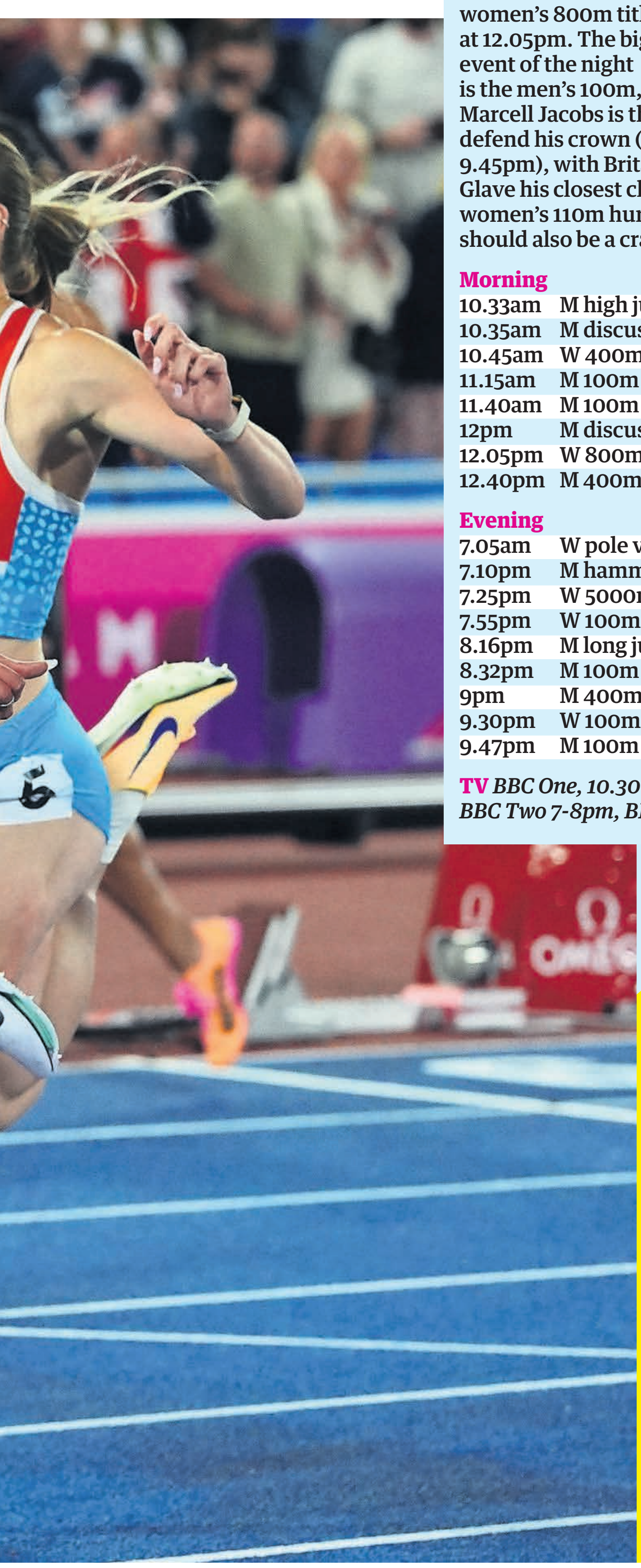
Morning

10.33am	M high jump (qual)
10.35am	M discus (qual)
10.45am	W 400m hurdles (s-f)
11.15am	M 100m (1st rd)
11.40am	M 100m hurdles (1st rd)
12pm	M discus (qual)
12.05pm	W 800m (1st rd)
12.40pm	M 400m hurdles (1st rd)

Evening

7.05am	W pole vault (qual)
7.10pm	M hammer (final)
7.25pm	W 5000m (final)
7.55pm	W 100m hurdles (s-f)
8.16pm	M long jump (final)
8.32pm	M 100m (s-f)
9pm	M 400m (s-f)
9.30pm	W 100m hurdles (final)
9.47pm	M 100m (final)

TV *BBC One, 10.30-1.15pm; BBC Two 7-8pm, BBC One 8-10pm*



◀ *Amy Hunt finishes fastest after a sluggish start to claim gold for Great Britain in the final of the women's 100m*
MARTIN RICKETT/PA

be the best," she said. "I don't shy away from that. I train incredibly hard, and I back myself so incredibly hard because I do want to be the best. "I'm not saying that I'm the best right now, but that's something I aspire to be."

Hunt said she was so nervous before the race that she was unable to nap. Instead, she was just lay awake in bed with her eyes closed. "But I as soon as I get to the track, my nerves disappear," she said.

"I love doing what I do. My coach keeps me really chilled. Megan Thee Stallion [American rapper] kept me kind of nice and upbeat, and you can't be nervous when you listen to that."

She also relaxed by playing puzzle games such as Connections, Spelling Bee, Pips and Wordle. "It wakes my brain up without having to overthink.

"Even at training, we're all competitive every single day about Wordle and how many kind of words we got on Spelling Bee, so it just keeps my brain ticking over, listening to Megan Thee Stallion, house music, a bit of Mamma Mia in there, so just not getting too overly serious."

Moments before Hunt's victory there was also a plucky silver for Great Britain's mixed 4x400m relay team behind the gold medallists Norway.

Britain's team of Ben Jefferies, Charlotte Henrich, Toby Harries and Yemi Mary John all ran well. But a Norway team spearheaded by the 400m hurdles world record-holder, Karsten Warholm, and the fastest woman in Europe this year, Henriette Jæger, proved too strong as they set a Championship record of 3:09.62, nearly a second clear of Britain.

The only disappointment was that more people were not here to witness it given that the Alexander Stadium, which seats about 20,000, looked barely half full.

However, organisers said 13,623 tickets had been sold for last night – along with 170,000 tickets for the week – and that from Thursday night onwards the event was pretty much a sellout.

Ingebrigtsen blitzes the field to seal 5,000m title in style

Sean Ingles

There are some people who believe that Jakob Ingebrigtsen lacks a sprint finish. The evidence of the Norwegian's spectacular victory charge to claim his fourth European 5,000m title suggests otherwise.

So much for all the doubts and questions swirling around him coming into the championships. He had been injured. He had not raced for 11 months. He was apparently vulnerable. Yet, as usual, Ingebrigtsen found a way to win gold again.

This surely ranks as one of the most thrilling of his career. Coming around the final bend, he was third and boxed in behind the Frenchman Jimmy Gressier and the German Florian Bremm, yet he found a gap and powered home in 13min 15.29sec.

Bremm took silver, with Etienne Daguinos of France claiming bronze. Ingebrigtsen is now the first man to win four European titles in the same event. For good measure, he has also won 17 European gold medals if you include cross-country victories.

It was especially sweet given he has struggled with achilles injuries over the past 17 months. "I dreamt of this moment two weeks ago when I put my name on the list," said Ingebrigtsen, who ran a 54 second last lap. "I crossed my fingers that I would be here and feel better. It was just enough so I am extremely happy. With 600 metres to go, I knew I was going to get that gold medal. I was just hoping and hoping that I was not going to get too tired."

His return had represented the biggest enigma of the week. The Norwegian had a 14-race winning streak at European championships, indoor and out, going back to 2019. But he had not raced for 11 months. In his imperious past, Ingebrigtsen would have been favourite against a field that included Switzerland's Dominic Lobalu, who finished fourth at the Olympics in 2024. Not this time. And who could blame the doubters, given Ingebrigtsen had surgery on the sheath around his left achilles tendon in February. But he proved he hadn't come to Birmingham for a Balti or a trip to the Ozzy Osbourne exhibition. When Ingebrigtsen was announced to the crowd it took several seconds for the stadium PA to list his achievements. The Norwegian stood impassively and then raised one finger. On the track he was soon to prove it.

▲ *Jakob Ingebrigtsen dispelled any fitness doubts in a thrilling success*

Sport
In brief

Athletics

Russia files challenge against sporting ban

Russian Athletics has lodged a new claim with the court of arbitration for sport challenging sanctions imposed by World Athletics as the federation seeks to restore the participation of Russian athletes in international competition. The federation said that the latest appeal targets restrictions it argues infringe its rights and prevent it from fully representing Russian athletes internationally. Russian athletes have been excluded from international competition since the Ukraine invasion in 2022. **Reuters**

Cricket

ICC plans for World Cup restructure under fire

Scotland and the Netherlands have criticised the restructuring of next year's 50-over World Cup, saying the changes "risk weakening the integrity and credibility of international cricket". At last month's board meeting in Edinburgh, the International Cricket Council announced the main part of the tournament in southern Africa will contain a dozen teams split into two groups of six. There will still be 14 participants but the tournament is slated to start with a preliminary round involving the three lowest-ranked qualifiers, with only one team progressing to the group stage. **PA Media**

Rugby union

Fourie in South Africa squad for Rivalry game

South Africa have recalled 39-year-old utility forward Deon Fourie for Rugby's Greatest Rivalry series against New Zealand, almost three years after he starred in the 12-11 final win at the 2023 Rugby World Cup against the All Blacks. Fourie, who can cover hooker and loose-forward, has not played a Test since coming on early in Paris but was excellent for the Stormers in their 38-21 defeat by New Zealand on Friday. **Reuters**

Badminton

Monkey whisperers called in for world finals

The workforce behind badminton's World Championships in New Delhi next week will feature a group of men mimicking the calls of langurs. Rhesus monkeys are a menace in India's capital and the Badminton Association of India was left red-faced when a monkey was spotted roaming in the gallery during the Indian Open this year. "Monkeys are absolutely terrified of langurs, which is why mimicking is so effective," Zafar, a third-generation monkey whisperer, told reporters. An overpopulation of pigeons in Delhi is another headache for the organisers. During the Indian Open, a match was halted twice after birds fouled the court. **Reuters**

Results

Football

CARABAO CUP

First round

Plymouth	(0) **2**	**Exeter**	(0) **0**
Hartridge 90+2 Pepple 90+4			

Cricket

THIRD MEN'S ONE-DAY INTERNATIONAL

Belfast Ireland 206. Afghanistan 207-7 (Rahmanullah Gurbaz 71; G Hoey 4-34). Afghanistan beat Ireland by three wickets.

THE HUNDRED MEN

Trent Bridge Trent Rockets 158-5. Southern Brave 159-4 (T Stubbs 52no; MP Stoinis 46). Brave beat Rockets by six wickets.

THE HUNDRED WOMEN

Trent Bridge Southern Brave 117-5. Trent Rockets 118-7. Rockets beat Brave by three wickets.

Tennis

ATP NATIONAL BANK OPEN (Montreal, Canada)

Last 16: J Mensik (Cz) bt B van de Zandschulp (Neth) 6-4 7-5

WTA NATIONAL BANK OPEN (Toronto, Canada)

Last 16: B Bencic (Swi) bt A Eala (Phi) 6-4 6-0; **N Osaka** (Jpn) bt L Fernandez (Can) 6-4 6-4

Snooker

CHINA OPEN (Taiyuan)

Last 32: H Vafaei (Irn) bt M Allen (NI) w/o; **N Robertson** (Aus) bt Chang B (Chn) 6-3; **Si J** (Chn) bt Jun J (Chn) 6-0; **M Selby** (Eng) bt Pang J (Chn) 6-3; **K Wilson** (Eng) bt A Hill (Ire) 6-5.

Athletics

EUROPEAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS (Birmingham)

Women's shot put: 1 J Schilder (Neth) 20.73m; **2** J van Klinken (Neth) 19.64m; **3** Y Mabry (Ger) 19.50m

Men's shot put: 1 L Fabbri (It) 22.31m; **2** Z Weir (It) 21.12; **3** V Petersson (Swe) 20.97; **4** S Lincoln (GB) 20.81.

Men's 5000m: 1 J Ingebrigtsen (Nor) 13:15.29; **2** F Bremm (Ger) 13:15.60; **3** E Daguinos (Fr) 13:16.09.

Mixed 4x400m relay: 1 Norway 3min 9.62sec; **2** Great Britain 3:10.47; **3** Netherlands 3:10.77.

Women's 100m: 1 A Hunt (GB) 11.00sec; **2** E Swoboda (Pol) 11.02; **3** D Nkansa (Bel) 11.06.

Fixtures

Football (7.45pm unless stated)

Champions League

Third qualifying round: second leg Bodø/Glimt (3) v Union Saint-Gilloise (3) (5pm); Celje (1) v Ararat-Armenia (2) (7.15pm); Kairat (0) v Levski Sofia (1) (4pm); Kauno Zalgiris (0) v Dinamo Zagreb (5) (6pm); Lyon (1) v Sparta Prague (2) (8pm); NEC (0) v Olympiacos (0) (6.30pm); Red Star Belgrade (0) v Hapoel Be'er Sheva (1) (7pm); Sabah (1) v AGF (2) (5pm); Slovan Bratislava (2) v Mjällby (1) (7.15pm); Sturm Graz (0) v Fenerbahce (2) (7.30pm)

Europa League

Third qualifying round: second leg Iberia 1999 (0) v Larne (0) (5pm)

Conference League

Third qualifying round: second leg CSKA 1948 (1) v Panathinaikos (1) (6.30pm); Apollon (1) v Brann (0) (6pm)

National League Cup

Group C Hartlepool v Middlesbrough U21 (3pm)

KDM Evolution Trophy

First round Alloa v Stranraer; Banks O'Dee v Peterhead; Berwick v Hearts U21; Bonnyrigg v Annan; Clachnacuddin v Dundee Utd U21; Clyde v St Mirren U21; Clydebank v Hibernian U21; Dumbarton v Airdrieonians; East Fife v Spartans; East Kilbride v Kilmarnock U21; Edinburgh City v Cowdenbeath; Elgin v Ross County; Forfar v Aberdeen U21; Formartine v Dundee U21; Gala Fairydean v Rangers U21; Kelty Hearts v Motherwell U21; Montrose v Fraserburgh; Queen of the South v Cumbernauld; Stirling v Cove Rangers

Cricket (11am unless stated)

Metro Bank One Day Cup Men

Group A Gloucestershire v Northamptonshire, Cheltenham; Somerset v Lancashire, Taunton; Surrey v Nottinghamshire, The Kia Oval; Warwickshire v Kent, Rugby.

Group B Essex v Yorkshire, Chelmsford; Hampshire v Derbyshire, Utilita Bowl; Middlesex v Sussex, Radlett; Worcestershire v Durham, New Road

The Hundred Men

Manchester Super Giants v SunRisers Leeds, Old Trafford (6.30pm)

The Hundred Women

Manchester SG v SunRisers Leeds, Old Trafford (2.45pm)

Greg Wood's racing tips

Lingfield **2.30** Shifra **3.00** Ouragan **3.30** Spirit Of Athene (nb) **4.00** Charencey **4.30** Bone Marra **5.00** Jackson Street (nap)

Carlisle **2.45** Bay Dream Believer **3.15** Girl Scout **3.45** Concert Pitch **4.15** Jenever **4.45** Talismans Time **5.15** Only Dream Big

Hamilton **5.30** South Shore Island **6.00** Harley **6.30** Matter Of Britain **7.00** Dwindling Funds **7.30** Turtle Reef **8.00** Station X **8.30** Fairydale

Nottingham **5.45** Apulia Bay **6.15** Blessed Voyager **6.45** Hope Rising **7.15** Beauty Generation **7.45** Moulin Booj **8.15** Thunderous Love

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Sport

Audley Harrison
‘Superman left the building - but Clark Kent grew up’

Interview *Page 34* →

Legal action
Marinakis to sue Palace for defamation over banner

Page 36 →

MIKE EGERTON/PA IMAGES

Hunt scorches to golden glory

Briton conquers Europe
Page 38 →

Uefa, Concacaf and AFC push for Infantino to resign

Nick Ames
Matt Hughes

Uefa, the Asian Football Confederation and Concacaf will push for Gianni Infantino to resign after writing an open letter calling for “leadership that serves football, not seeks to command it”.

In a dramatic escalation of the war that has threatened to tear football apart since details emerged of the Fifa president’s failed Football Forward Enterprise (FFE) scheme, the three governing bodies accused Infantino of “trust broken through deception” and condemned his failure to acknowledge the proposal should not have been unilaterally launched.

The three confederations have started preliminary discussions about the organisation of new competitions along with Uefa’s repeated threats to boycott Fifa events. As things stand, the under-20 women’s World Cup next month could take place without European teams and alternative options are being sought.

The letter is signed by the Uefa president, Aleksander Ceferin, his AFC counterpart, Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, and the Concacaf president, Victor Montagliani. Efforts to unite around a suitable candidate to replace Infantino have stepped up since his privately backed plan was revealed and Montagliani is believed to be among the contenders.

“Leadership in football is not a possession,” the letter reads. “It is not about holding - or demanding - power to be held. It is a duty of service to the football family that entrusts it. When trust is broken through deception, when an individual places himself above the collective that entrusted him with authority, that duty has been abandoned.”

It strongly criticises Fifa’s response to the crisis, when a meeting between a small number of senior staff in Rabat was followed by an apology from Infantino that appeared not to show remorse for the

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▲ *The federations said that trust in Gianni Infantino had been broken*

Bezos in prime position
Amazon founder’s group close in on £1.35bn Liverpool stake

Will Unwin

A consortium including the Amazon founder, Jeff Bezos, is close to completing a deal for a 30% stake in Liverpool after months of talks with Fenway Sports Group. The investors are led by Amit Bhatia, the son-in-law of the Indian billionaire Lakshmi Mittal who was a shareholder and director at Queens Park Rangers.

The Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin is another member of the group who will pay in the region of £1.35bn. The deal is effectively agreed, but may take up to a month to complete.

Bezos has a personal fortune of $257bn (£190bn), according to Forbes, making him the fourth-richest person in the world, while Saverin reportedly is worth $32bn. This will be Bezos’s first investment in football, but he has looked previously into bidding for NFL franchises. The 62-year-old will receive equity as part of the deal on which Deloitte has advised.

Bezos is the executive chair of Amazon having relinquished day-to-day control when he stepped down as chief executive five years ago. Under his leadership, the online retailer has diversified into being an entertainment provider and has bought numerous sports rights for its streaming service.

Amazon had live UK rights for 20 Premier League games each season for six seasons until the end of last year and broadcasts the Champions League in several European countries, as well as some NFL games in the US.

FSG bought Liverpool in 2010 and has overseen two Premier League titles. FSG sold 3% of the club to the US private equity firm Dynasty Equity in 2023. It has been a summer of change at Anfield, with Andoni Iraola replacing Arne Slot as head coach, Mohamed Salah left on a free transfer and has joined Trabzonspor, and Michael Edwards departed his role as chief executive officer at FSG.

FSG has been approached for comment.

Jeff Bezos is among the would-be investors

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The Guardian **Tuesday 11 August 2026**

Journal

Opinion and ideas

IMAGE: GUARDIAN DESIGN/GETTY

As the PM sets off around the country, will the cash follow?

Peter Hetherington

Andy Burnham begins his travels this week, aiming to reconnect No 10 and the government with voters across the UK. But just weeks before he set out his stall as prime minister, promising to rebalance the economy with growth in every postcode, a government agency, National Highways, underlined the pulling power of the country's dominant city-region. It announced that a giant tunnelling machine, 16.4 metres in diameter, "the largest ever used in Europe", was to take England's most expensive road under the River Thames.

The Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), so far priced at £10-£11bn, is proving to be a contested 14.5-mile venture on the edge of Greater London. Objectors and councils say it will deliver only short-term congestion relief and destroy ancient woodland and habitats. At 2.6 miles, the road tunnel will be the country's longest, involving twin-boring for two three-lane highways connecting the M25 in Essex to the A2/M2 in Kent. The government has so far committed £3.1bn funding, with the rest from the private sector. We shall see.

No matter that the LTC is, on some estimates, likely to cost more per mile than the HS2 rail link from London to the Midlands - which, as things stand, will end illogically at Handsacre junction in Staffordshire instead of connecting to Crewe, a key rail hub linking England, Scotland and Wales.

The prime minister's ambitions are bold, but from where I'm writing, 282 miles north of London in the Tyne valley, it's clear that the priority of successive governments is sustaining the growth of the capital as it faces unprecedented demand for energy and water to service the more than 200 datacentres operating, or under development, in this expanding city-region.

National Highways insists that the Lower Thames Crossing will give "millions of people more choice on where they live, work and spend their valuable time" - assuming there's adequate power to sustain more building. Fine words. But contrast this with the decision of the agency to scrap a 13-mile dualling of the A1 in Northumberland, where six people have died over the past year in road accidents, as poor value for money. From such issues, resentments grow over London's domination.

And that could get worse. No matter what initiatives might be announced by Burnham on his travels, he faces one overarching challenge: squaring the seemingly

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Peter Hetherington *writes for Society Guardian on communities and regeneration*

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As the PM sets off around the country, will the cash follow?

Peter Hetherington

← *Continued from front*

unstoppable market-led growth of big tech and AI in and around London, with his wider ambition for a more balanced economy throughout England. This is the task in a country with no national planning framework - still less a regional policy - to determine priorities over the next 20 years or so.

In these islands, England is now the outlier. Unlike Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it lacks a strategy for national development to ensure that one city-region does not dominate the national economy at the expense of others.

What's happening is seismic. Ron Martin, a professor of economic geography at Cambridge University, says London is fast reinventing itself as a global tech capital, its third reincarnation of the last 100 years. According to Deloitte, the "golden triangle" of London, Oxford and Cambridge accounted for almost 70% of investment in the high-growth tech sector in 2023, with London alone attracting 132 foreign direct investment projects, reflecting its position as the leading European city for digital tech.

These are early days, of course, for the prime minister. His major initiative to devolve more powers and, potentially, a portion of locally raised income tax and business rates to the 18 English mayoral strategic authorities or city-regions will be fleshed out in an autumn white paper. So far, cautiously, Burnham's ideas have been welcomed by the Institute for Government and others, but they will need fine-tuning to ensure both an equalising formula to compensate poorer areas, and a scrutiny mechanism to oversee financial transparency.

What's promised is not regional policy as we knew it - the previous system aligned with the EU's structural funds tailored to help poorer regions: those with GDP levels well below the union's average. This is very different. In a clear break with the past, it represents a place-based, asymmetric devolution strategy, driven eventually by empowered city-regions. That does seem like progress. But the prime minister must know it will take time to bed down, beyond this parliament.

Until 2010, England had eight defined regions plus Greater London, with well-funded regional development agencies (RDAs) and government offices for the regions (GORs) providing a direct civil service link to Whitehall, and regional strategies to underpin growth strategies. While relatively short-lived, over their 12 years, RDAs levered an estimated £5.7bn in private funding for business support and regeneration. They were described as having "a track record of successful delivery" by the National Audit Office. But they were never designed to bridge a divide between London, the south-east and the rest of England, in contrast to earlier regional policy based on rebalancing the economy away from the capital.

That may change, but even in the best-case scenario, Burnham's devolution will take time to improve quality of life for millions - those marooned in the postcode lottery between winners in prosperous places and losers in left-behind communities. Think of the former industrial heartlands of the north, the run-down seaside towns, the seemingly forgotten parts of rural England. The active state the prime minister envisages must fill a huge void.

So what to do? For a start, England needs a reborn national agency to kickstart both neighbourhood renewal and business support. It would partner councils, the private sector and institutions close to government with the expertise and resources to access funds from entities such as the crown estate, a £16bn asset newly blessed with borrowing powers, and from the Treasury-owned National Wealth Fund, with its £27.8bn of public-private money to invest.

Beyond that, we need a new settlement for England where demand for energy and water alone in the south-east, with pressure for new housing, will have to force a rethink about national priorities. That thinking needs to start now. Fortunately, we're being told that, as he travels the land, Burnham is in listening mode.

Gaza peace plan

Hollow claims of deals will not shift Netanyahu. Only real US pressure will

At the end of July, Donald Trump announced that a "monumental" US-backed deal had been struck on Gaza, securing the phased disarmament of Hamas in parallel with Israeli military withdrawal. Three days later it was reported that another 18 people had died in Israeli airstrikes. Not for the first time, it appeared that Mr Trump's rhetoric had only a distant relationship with the reality it purported to describe.

Such suspicions were duly confirmed on Sunday. Under pressure from far-right members of his coalition, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, explicitly rejected the sequencing of a 15-point plan from the increasingly hapless Board of Peace - an international body set up by the US president - and poured scorn on "a wave of rumours of ... Israeli withdrawals on all fronts". In a direct message to the White House, Mr Netanyahu stated that "we know how to stand our ground, even against our best friends when necessary."

In practical terms that will mean the continued, brazen violation of the terms of last October's ceasefire agreement, since when close to 1,300 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli air assaults. Far from envisaging any withdrawal, the Israeli military has expanded its presence and now controls about 65% of the territory. Hemmed in towards the coast in the rest of the strip, much of the population faces an unrelenting daily struggle.

Formal schooling has not restarted, the healthcare system has been largely destroyed and the entry of medical and other humanitarian aid remains severely restricted. Reconstruction work has been blocked, while the first building contract issued by the Board of Peace has been for an outpost to host foreign troops. Meanwhile, the world's attention has shifted to Mr Trump's illegal and reckless war on Iran - a grievous miscalculation in which Israel's prime minister also played his part.

In calling for complete Hamas disarmament before Israel makes a move, Mr Netanyahu is transparently playing for time. For two years he has relentlessly flattered the US president, and exploited his backing to pursue a scorched earth project of revenge following the Hamas massacre of October 7. But two months out from the first elections held since then, his priority now is appeasing the intransigent far-right forces who can keep him in power. Should Mr Netanyahu lose, he could face jail in relation to corruption charges first laid more than five years ago.

Despairing Palestinians can only hope that growing White House frustration with Mr Netanyahu's forever wars will lead to a tipping point - one that should have been reached during the Joe Biden presidency. If he opted to use it, Mr Trump has the power to isolate the Israeli prime minister, call time on his temporising and manoeuvring, and compel a different approach. Board of Peace attempts on Sunday to reassure the Israeli government over the verification process for disarming Hamas indicate that we are not close to that point.

Nevertheless, ahead of challenging midterm elections for the Republicans, pro-Israel sentiment may not be the political force that it once was. Recent polling suggests that traditionally high levels of US public sympathy with Israel are on the wane. Mr Trump has a choice: he can continue to accept being played by Israel's prime minister, or he can exert the kind of pressure that could bring genuine relief to Gaza.

Smart glasses

Businesses are ahead of ministers in standing up against intrusive gadgets

It is not yet clear to what extent Meta's new smart glasses will live up to the nickname of "pervert glasses" - bestowed in recognition of the obvious appeal of wearable cameras to voyeurs. The past week has seen rising criticism of the devices, which in the UK have been banned by the pub chain Wetherspoons and the theatre group ATG, as well as restaurants, schools and members' clubs. These organisations deserve praise for standing up for privacy. By contrast, regulators appear once again to be on the back foot.

There have, inevitably, already been reports of women being mistreated. Earlier this year the BBC spoke to several who had been filmed without their consent, with footage subsequently uploaded to social media. In one case, the content creator demanded a fee to remove it. In the year to March 2025, image-based sexual abuse and cyberflashing were responsible for more than half of an 11% increase in reported sexual offences in England and Wales. Normalisation of smart glasses would, clearly, make such offences easier to commit.

Worrying as this is, it is not the only reason to be concerned. Privacy has much wider significance and most people, as the businesses banning smart glasses from their premises have recognised, do not want to be filmed as they go about their lives. While videoing in public is not illegal, this does not give smart glasses wearers the right to place others under involuntary surveillance. An LED light that blinks when the camera is in use, and cannot be disabled, is not an adequate safeguard, whatever Meta might think. Pubs, parks, beaches and workplaces are not film sets.

Having invested $80bn in its latest product, Mark Zuckerberg's company is unlikely to give up easily on its ambition to make the glasses, which have been likened to face-mounted smartphones, as ubiquitous as the handheld kind. More than a decade after the first smart glasses, made by Google, flopped, Meta has bet heavily on making its latest version more stylish, functional and affordable - with UK prices starting at £269. The choice of Kylie Jenner to front this summer's advertising campaign, and the slogan "Never miss a moment", aimed at parents of young children, appear calculated to dispel fears about how the glasses will be used by sexually predatory men.

Like most digital devices, these ones can be helpful as well as harmful. As aids for people who are blind or visually impaired, smart glasses that can read text or describe images have been described as life-changing. Any restrictions, in the UK or elsewhere, should be crafted so as to enable such uses to continue - just as guide dogs are exempted from rules about pets. But while the benefits that smart glasses offer to groups of people with specific needs should be recognised, this must not be allowed to distract from their potential to cause harm.

Tech regulation is difficult. But given the UK government's recent moves towards restricting smartphone use among young people, and the public outcry regarding sexualised AI imagery, it is disappointing that ministers have so far had almost nothing to say about the rollout of wearable hidden cameras. While the tech companies market their products as tools to be used, one of the key lessons of the last two decades is that users are rarely, if ever, as in control as they would like to be. Ministers and regulators should be active, not passive, as Meta intentionally blurs the line between looking and filming.

How to make sense of this time of chaos? Read poetry

Charlotte Higgins

Matt Damon, left, as Odysseus in The Odyssey
PHOTOGRAPH: MELINDA SUE GORDON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

The biggest sales of poetry since records began are expected this year. The reason? The movies, of course. UK print sales of The Odyssey increased by 1,400% in the four weeks to 25 July compared with the same period last year. In the US, year-to-date sales of The Odyssey are up 76% so far. Christopher Nolan is doing miracles for Homer - whatever problems one might have with the film.

Strip out the Odyssey factor, though, and poetry is still doing exceptionally well, driven by writers whose work is often mildly denigrated as “Instapoetry”, such as Lucas Jones. His is a kind of versifying that delivers immediate uplifting aphorisms rather than either the kind of dense, allusive play with language that might reward repeated reading, or the sort of limpid, performable music that propels a well-translated Homeric epic. But even so, the poets of Instagram reach for something that can’t quite be expressed through everyday speech. And readers respond to it.

Sales figures are a rough and insubstantial metric, though. They don’t tell us how someone feels when they read a good poem, what it expands for them, what memories it brings, what connections to other times and places. What shiver of alienation it offers; what moment (often) of puzzlement. Poetry can be baffling; it can refuse to unfurl all of itself to the reader. Better, I think, to sink into the sensations that a poem creates than always to worry at it like a puzzle. By its nature, poetry expresses what can’t be said in prose; it can be resistant, you can snag on it. Poetry is needed in an emergency, when ordinary ways of writing or speaking can’t get at the moment, or the feeling, or the thought.

What poetry is not, however, is peripheral to human life. What I have learned by reporting from Ukraine is that when catastrophe hovers overhead rather than looms from a distance, poetry seems more, rather than less, vital. The most rapt poetry reading I have ever attended was in the frontline city of Kharkiv, the border with Russia only 30km away, when one poet described scratching poems into the wall of her Russian prison cell, and audience members silently mouthed the learned-by-heart words of the writer Serhii Zhadan’s poems as he performed them.

> **“The poetry emerging from Ukraine and Gaza provides the most arresting document of lives being lived amid cataclysm**

The foreign correspondent Lindsey Hilsum, who has covered wars and humanitarian crises for decades, has long understood this, which is why I Brought the War with Me, her anthology of work by poets across time and geographies, accompanied by her stories, is such a treasure. The poetry emerging from Gaza, and from Palestinian poets scattered across the world - figures such as Haia Mohammed and Fady Joudah - provides the most arresting document of lives being lived amid cataclysm: such poetry is composed with an urgency, vividness and compression that no other art form can quite achieve.

It is true, as the Ukrainian poet Halyna Kruk said in 2022, that “no poetry can save you from a tank”. It is true, as her fellow Ukrainian writer Kateryna Iakovlenko has put it, that the poetry created most obviously by war is asemic, ugly and inscribed into the very land: “Ruins and abandoned houses, devastated forests, burnt land and roads carved up by tanks and armoured personnel carriers began to resemble letters and unwritten sentences.”

And yet, with remarkable speed, and despite its failure either to deflect bullets, or keep its writers and readers physically safe, poetry quickly began to be written in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion. Poetry was the form that could grapple most effectively with the collapse in meaning brought about by the shock of violence, the feeling that time had ceased to carry significance, the future ripped away. Poems could be written relatively quickly, with limited means, and even in inhospitable places (the shelter, the trench).

The novelist Victoria Amelina, who was killed by a Russian bomb that targeted the restaurant where she was eating, had stopped writing novels (which both take time to write and contain time as an ingredient) and started writing poetry. Some of it denied its own status as poetry, as if it were just the shrapnel-hit remnants of language. One poem, Not Poetry, translated by Uilleam Blacker, contains the lines, “But the reality of war / devours punctuation / plot structure / structure ...”

Poems have been written at the front. The young writer Artur Dron’, who served in the Ukrainian armed forces, did not write about bravado or heroism, but made small, delicate memorials for fellow soldiers who had been killed. Or sometimes he built encapsulations of seemingly insignificant moments.

One of his poems is about a child in some unnamed village near the frontline, who becomes the unofficial mascot of the soldiers posted there. At Christmas, they leave the young boy “a bag with our crushed Snickers bars / and tangerines. / The ones with seeds, / but oh so sweet.” It was a fleeting incident: not newsworthy, not impressive - but it was material for a poem. Yaryna Chornohuz told me that her work as a soldier poet was the “documentation of feelings”.

In the midst of a cataclysm, poems survive, often stripped back to their most essential forms, which are surely universal human forms of expression: the lament for the dead, the lullaby for the child, the curse. In the end, humans need those things: those songs, those poems. They are proof of life. They may not be remembered, but poetry has a better chance at survival than much else that humans do or make. They may become memorials more lasting than bronze.

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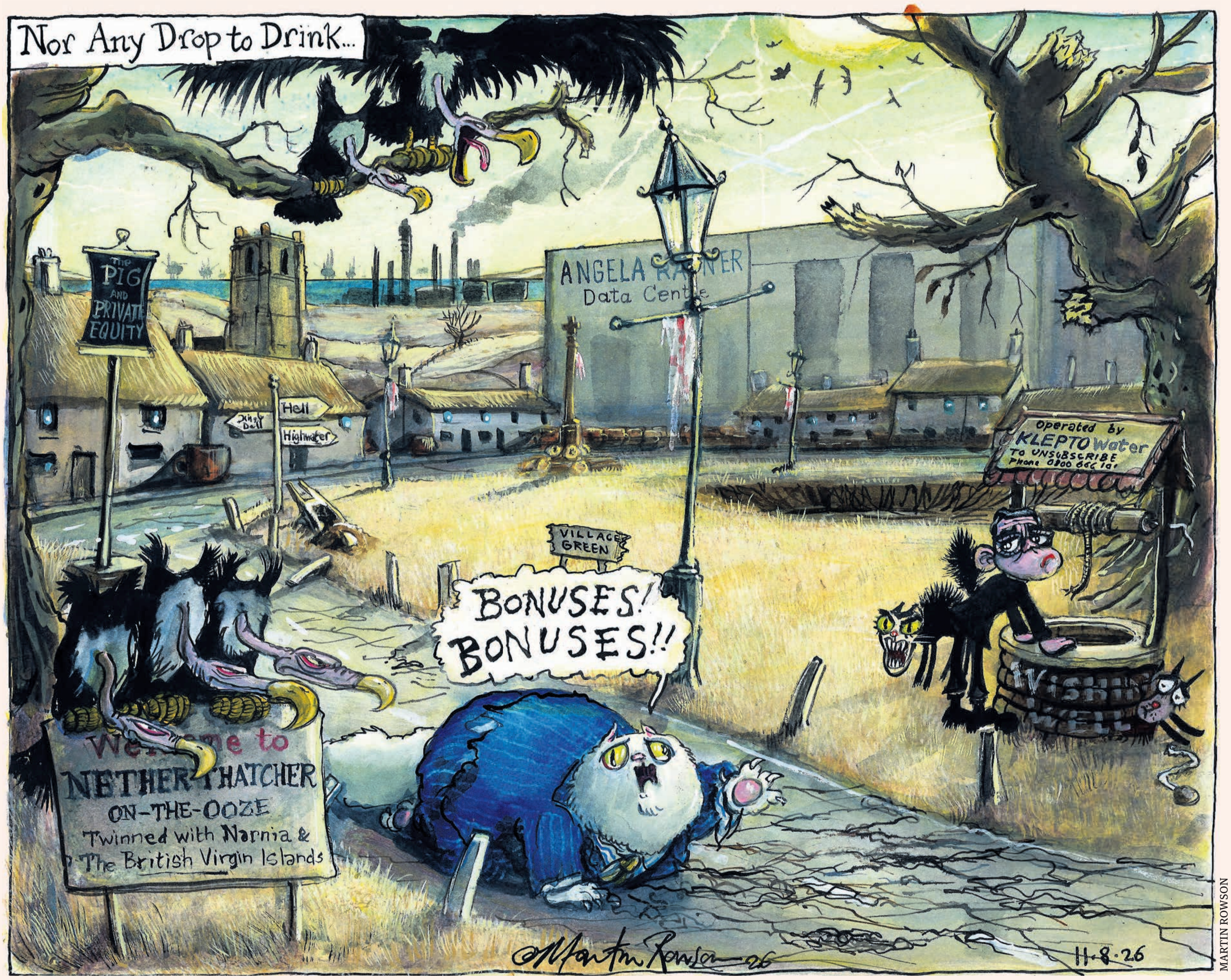
Charlotte Higgins *is the Guardian’s chief culture writer. Join her and a panel of Ukrainian writers on Wednesday 30 September to reflect on the connections between war and art. Book at theguardian.com*



MARTIN ROWSON

It's no bad thing having a TikTok dad in No 10

Lucy O'Brien

Done up in his navy suit, blue tie and charmingly nerdy glasses, Andy Burnham entered Downing Street as our fifth prime minister in four years. I didn't watch this historic scene live on BBC News. Instead, I saw a 10-second clip on TikTok, with a viral Love Island soundbite: "A hot new bombshell has entered the villa." Not exactly the introduction you might expect for a world leader - or is it?

The video sent millions of eyes rolling backwards and many flocking to the comments, cringing at the idea of British politics succumbing to ridiculous social media trends. Critics have called his social media strategy "trivial" and a "distraction". After years of leadership turmoil and a flailing Labour government under Keir Starmer, should we really be making light of yet another transfer of power on a platform designed for teenagers?

More than a month into the job, Burnham's team has continued the shenanigans on his own social media accounts (where he has more than a million followers across Instagram and TikTok combined). Scroll down his feed and you will still find a fair amount of silliness - but the tide is starting to change.

One video starts with the PM defending "barms" - the northern-preferred nickname for a bread roll (it's definitely a bap, sorry Andy) - before seamlessly flowing into a metaphor for his strategy of devolution, and handing back power to local councils. It now has more than 850,000 views.

Similarly, when he talked through his education strategy on TikTok, cheekily transitioning between holding a graduation cap and hard hat, his audience listened. That video has 3m views and is flooded with comments of people feeling alarmingly inspired by his plans. "Have we actually maybe finally got a good one?" one user said. Finally, it seems we have a politician who comes across like a real person who knows how to talk to other real people (even if it does remind you of your dad trying to prove he's down with the kids) - and for gen Z members like me, it's working.

Social media popularity isn't the end goal, but it is the first hurdle. If you want young people to vote for you, you have to find a way to make them care. You have to meet them where they are. And in today's attention-span economy, that is the hardest job of all. Reuters' 2026 Digital News Report found that, globally, 52% of 18- to 24-year-olds use social media, video networks and AI chatbots as the main way of getting their news.

If you're over 30, Burnham's videos may seem clumsy - embarrassing, even. But don't get it twisted, the PM's team knows exactly what it's doing. Burnham has tapped into something I have long understood: if we stand any chance of overturning the general sense of misery in this country, we need to get young people to believe in politics again. This is the first time in my adult life I have heard my peers say they actually *like* what the PM is doing, that they think he's a decent guy, and that there's a reason to hope again.

Since the Brexit referendum in 2016, I've seen my generation become increasingly disillusioned with politics. Faced with crippling student loans, the risk of becoming a Neet, or the seeming impossibility of getting on the property ladder, young people have had little to hope for under previous governments. Rebuilding trust among the young is the only way to dismantle more than a decade of political alienation.

What Burnham is doing is nothing new. Labour understood the power of social media to rally younger voters during the 2024 general election, and it paid off. YouGov polling shows that 41% of those aged 18-24 voted Labour, rising to 45% among those aged 25-29. Keir Starmer was the first British PM to launch a personal TikTok profile, where he tried - and failed - to maintain Labour's initial momentum. Ultimately, his stuffy and ineffective communication style ended up turning off the very voters that handed him his mandate in the first place. Hopefully, Burnham won't make the same mistake.

TikTok fame won't buy Burnham unwavering support. Nor should it. We may be a fickle generation, but we're not stupid. No one really thinks a few viral videos equates to the PM effecting real and lasting change. But getting young people on side is essential work; work that could keep Labour in government for a generation, if he plays his cards right.

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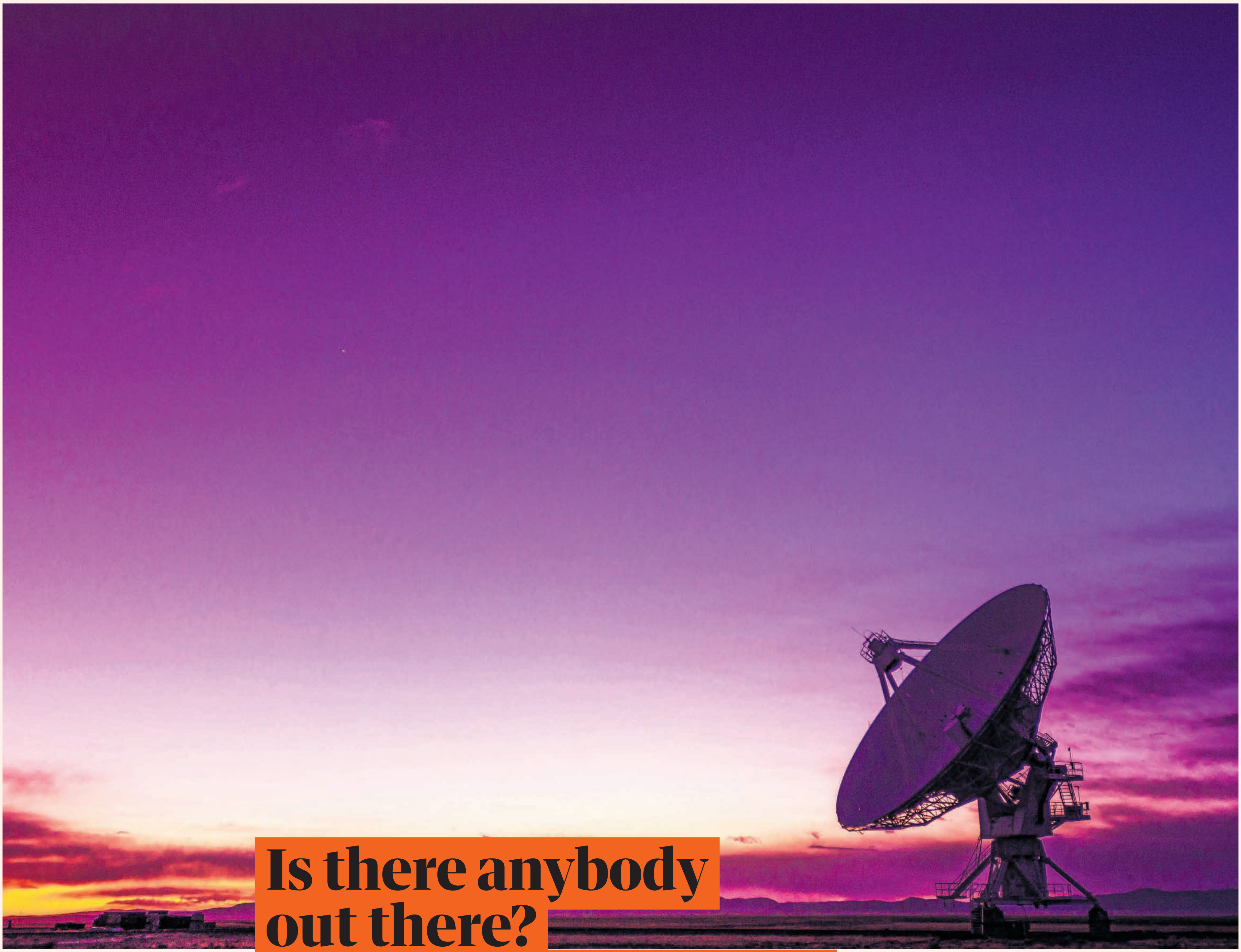
Lucy O'Brien
is a deputy audience editor at the Guardian



A radio telescope at Socorro, New Mexico

RUSS BISHOP/ALAMY

Is there anybody out there?

There's no reason Earth should be the only home for intelligent life. So why, despite scouring outer space, have we not found any?

Adam Kirsch

During a visit to the Los Alamos National Laboratory in 1950, Enrico Fermi, one of the architects of the Manhattan Project, was having lunch with other physicists when the conversation turned to flying saucers. At one point during the discussion, Fermi blurted out: "Where is everybody?" - or, as another participant remembered it, "Don't you ever wonder where everybody is?" If aliens exist, in other words, why have we never encountered them?

The episode has become famous, marking the moment when extraterrestrial life went from a theme for philosophical speculation to a serious scientific problem. For centuries, people had wondered whether life exists on the moon or Mars, but they accepted that we would never know for certain, since making contact with another planet was impossible. By the 1950s, those limits no longer seemed so fixed. In addition to space flight, researchers were developing tools to detect the radio signals that reach us from stars many light years away. These developments were still in their infancy, but it was already clear that humanity was no longer bound to Earth the way it always had been.

This expansion of human horizons raised an awkward question. Since the 16th century, when Copernicus showed that Earth is not the centre of the cosmos, modern science had learned to embrace the idea that there is nothing unique about our planet. And if Earth is statistically average, there is no reason why it should be the only home of intelligent life. Given the age of the universe – about 13.8bn years, according to current estimates – it should be full of species with technology far more advanced than what we have come up with in a few thousand years of civilisation. Yet we can't find any trace of them.

That was the case in 1950, and it is still the case today, despite well-publicised claims to the contrary. Since 2017, when the New York Times reported that the US military possessed video recordings of pilots' encounters with UFOs, aliens have gone mainstream. The House of Representatives even held hearings on what are now called unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP) as a potential national security threat. But the blurry and inconclusive "Pentagon UFO videos" have not been followed by any clear images of nonhuman craft, just as earlier waves of UFO sightings never produced any unambiguous evidence.

For most scientists, the real mystery about aliens isn't their presence but their stubborn absence.

The first serious effort to detect radio signals from alien civilisations in deep space was made in 1960, when the American astronomer Frank Drake conducted an experiment he named Project Ozma. Using a telescope at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in West Virginia, Drake looked for signals at a precise location on the electromagnetic spectrum: 1420 MHz, known as the "hydrogen line" because hydrogen atoms emit photons at that frequency.

Because hydrogen is so abundant in the universe, the line is easy for radio telescopes to detect. In a 1959 paper, astronomers Giuseppe Cocconi and Philip Morrison argued that this fact would be discovered at an "early stage in the development of radio astronomy" by any technological civilisation, as it was by human beings. That made it likely, they reasoned, that any species looking to broadcast radio signals to attract the attention of cosmic neighbours would choose to do so at 1420 MHz. But though Project Ozma spent 150 hours observing two relatively nearby stars similar in size to our sun, it detected no unusual activity at the hydrogen line.

In 1971, Nasa convened a panel of experts to study the best ways to search for extraterrestrial life. Their report, Project Cyclops, was published the next year, and has remained a kind of bible for the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (usually shortened to Seti) ever since. The report called for the construction of the Cyclops system, "an 'orchard' of antennas 10km to 10 miles in diameter and containing 1,000 to perhaps 2,500 antennas". Such an array could scan the sky 200,000 times faster than Ozma.

The cost of building Cyclops was estimated at $10bn to $25bn, the equivalent of $77bn to $192bn today, making it about as expensive as the Apollo programme. It was never built, and Congress ended Nasa's modest funding for Seti projects in 1993. Since then all US efforts have been privately funded, mainly by billionaires such as Paul Allen, cofounder of Microsoft, and Yuri Milner, a Soviet-born entrepreneur. Advances in computer technology mean that today's Seti efforts are vastly more sophisticated than half a century ago, able to examine millions of radio channels from tens of thousands of galaxies. But the result remains the same: no artificial signal from an alien civilisation has ever been detected.

That doesn't discourage true believers. Seth Shostak, an astronomer at the California-based Seti Institute, writes that Seti's "failure is tempered by the fact that the number of star systems sampled is still quite small". In 2010, astronomer Jill Tarter, one of the leading figures in the field for decades, calculated that so little of the universe had been searched that it was like dipping a single glass into the ocean to determine whether it contains fish.

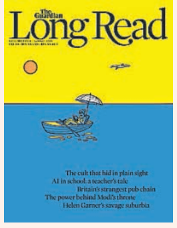
If extraterrestrial signals are out there and it's just a matter of looking in the right place, it's entirely possible that Seti could find one tomorrow. But it hasn't happened in more than 65 years of searching and, until it does, alien signals remain as hypothetical as alien spaceships. Not only is there no evidence that extraterrestrials are trying to contact or visit us; there is no evidence that they exist at all. And this non-appearance presents a more serious challenge to modern scientific assumptions than any UFO sighting. It turns out that there really is something unique about Earth: as far as we currently know, it is the only place where life exists. But why?

In October 1961, a year after Frank Drake failed to detect any alien radio signals with Project Ozma, he invited a dozen scientists to a conference to discuss the future of Seti. To clarify the problem, he tried to calculate how many extraterrestrial civilisations could be broadcasting radio signals in our galaxy. The answer, Drake reasoned, depended on seven variables, including "How many planets in an average system are capable of supporting life?" and "On planets where life exists, how often does an intelligent species like humanity evolve?"

Multiply all of the variables and you get the number of potential targets for Seti in the Milky Way. Drake wrote out the formula, which has been known ever since as the Drake equation. At the time, none of the variables could be estimated with any confidence. Drake's back-of-the-envelope calculations yielded an estimate of 50,000 transmitting civilisations, but this was essentially just a guess. The real purpose of the Drake equation was to establish a research programme, a set of questions for astronomers to try to answer. In the 21st century, they have made significant progress, thanks to new space-based telescopes that make it possible to see the cosmos in more detail than ever before.

For the first variable – how fast are new stars formed in the Milky Way – it's now estimated that 10 to 20 new stars are born every year (a far slower rate than when the galaxy was young and richer in star-forming gas). The total number of stars in our galaxy is on the order of 100bn. In the visible universe as a whole, there are an estimated 2tn galaxies, yielding a total of about 100 sextillion stars. So much is still unknown about the universe that this figure is certain to be revised, but it's sufficiently mind-boggling to get the Drake equation off to a promising start.

It is much easier to detect stars than the planets that orbit them, and in 1961 the answers to Drake's second and third questions – how many stars have planets, and how many of those planets are potentially habitable – were completely unknown. As telescopes gained in power, it became possible to detect exoplanets – planets outside our solar system – by measuring the tiny variations in a star's light caused by a planetary mass passing in front of it. The first exoplanet was detected in 1992, the second in 1995. The pace of discovery exploded in the 2010s, thanks to observations from the Kepler space telescope and the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite.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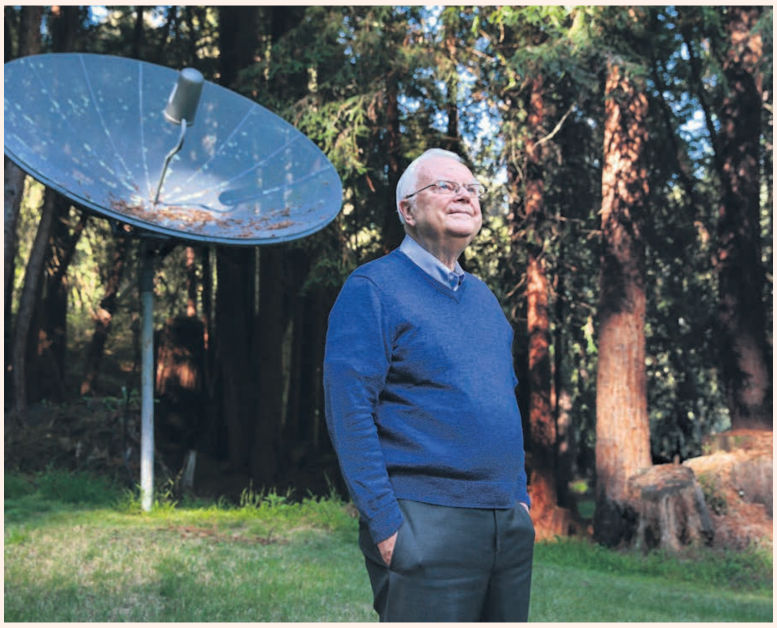


Frank Drake at his home in California in 2015

GETTY

As of 2025, some 6,000 exoplanets have been identified in the Milky Way, including at least three orbiting Proxima Centauri, the closest star to the sun. This is just the tip of the iceberg. While it's not yet possible to conclusively answer Drake's second question, a study published in Nature in 2012 suggested a minimum of 100bn planets in our galaxy alone.

To answer Drake's third question – how many of those planets are capable of sustaining life – a new scientific discipline has emerged: astrobiology, the study of life among the stars. This is a paradoxical endeavour, since there are no examples to study. Instead, astrobiologists think about the basic conditions that make life possible, and how we might determine whether distant planets meet those conditions.

Exoplanets are far too distant to see what is happening on the surface. But it's possible to measure the size of the planet and its distance from the star it orbits, and make deductions about its atmosphere and temperature – and, more indirectly, about its magnetic field. Since Earth is the only planet where we know life exists, it's natural to assume that exoplanets that resemble it in these respects are the most likely to be habitable.

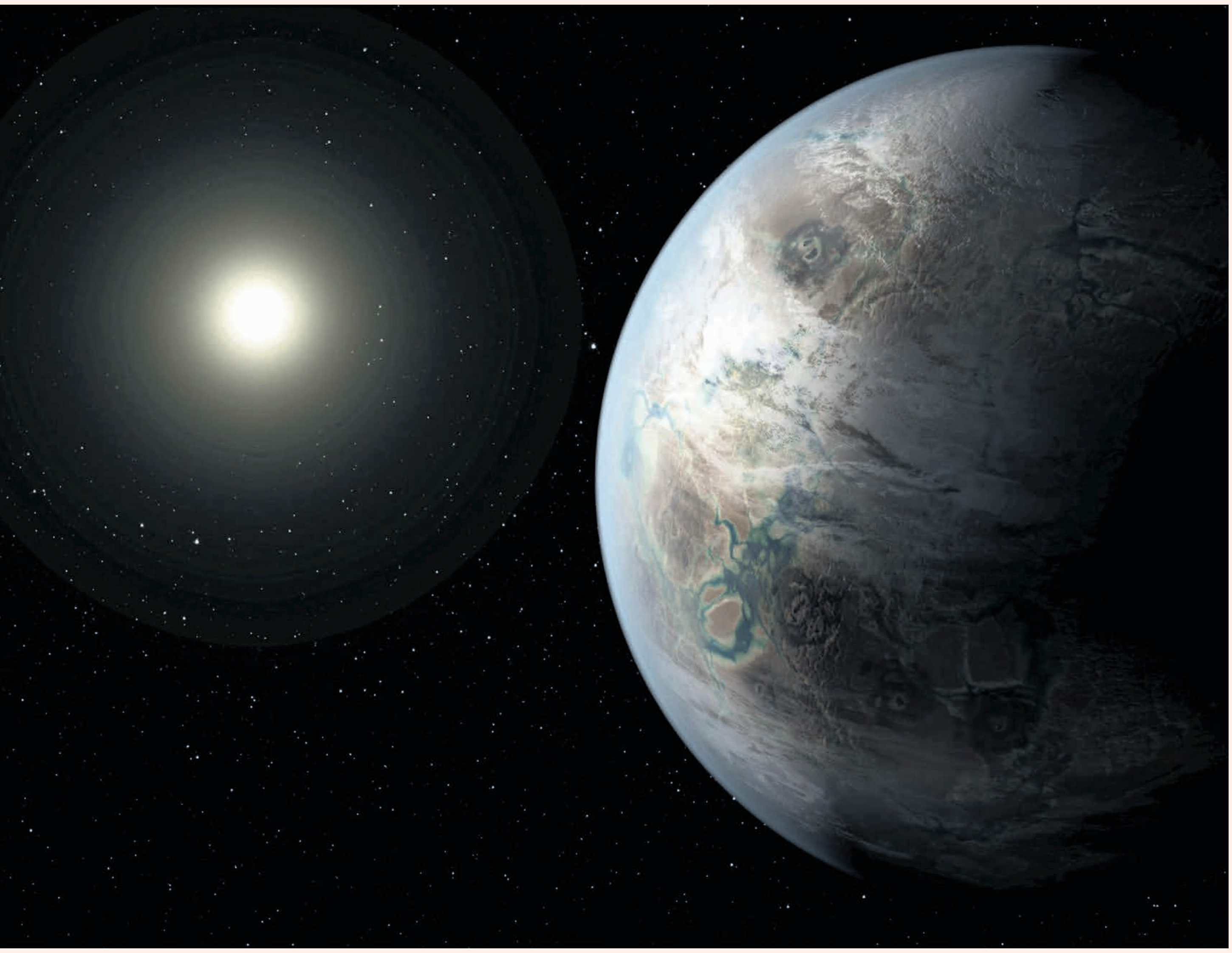
Astrobiological research thus also involves investigating life on our own planet, to understand the range of environments in which it can develop. The discovery of "extremophiles", primitive organisms that thrive in extreme conditions, has shown that living things can flourish under two miles of ice and in hot springs that reach 208F (98C). This suggests that life of some kind could develop even on inhospitable planets. For instance, while there is no liquid water on Mars today, frozen remnants of ancient oceans are thought to exist under its surface; it's possible that some kind of extremophilic life could be detected by future probes.

In 2025, Nasa announced that a rock sample analysed by the Perseverance rover included two minerals, vivianite and greigite, that on Earth are byproducts of bacterial metabolism. The minerals may be a sign that primitive microorganisms existed on Mars several billion years ago. If confirmed, this would be a revolutionary discovery. As the astrobiologist David Catling has written, "Even the simplest microbes native to Mars … would change the balance of probabilities that life exists elsewhere in the galaxy, for they would demonstrate that life can originate twice within one solar system." In fact, proof of life on Mars would not necessarily mean that it originated independently on two planets. It's also possible that life could have emerged on Earth and travelled to Mars or vice versa, carried through space in meteorites or dust. That would be evidence for the "panspermia" theory, which holds that life originated in just one or a few places in the cosmos and then spread naturally over eons.

On Earth, any life form more advanced than bacteria requires liquid water to survive. Thus the most important criterion for a habitable exoplanet is that it can't be too close to the star it orbits, where intense heat would evaporate water, or too far from the star, where cold would turn it into ice. If an Earthlike planet is inside the "Goldilocks zone" where the temperature is "just right" for liquid water to exist, it can be considered a candidate for life.

The first such planet to be discovered was Kepler-452b, seen by the Kepler space telescope in 2015. It is a bit larger than Earth and takes 385 days to complete an orbit of its star, very similar to our year of 365 days. By 2025, the Habitable Worlds Catalog, a database maintained by the University of Puerto Rico, included 29 Earthlike exoplanets, and the process of discovery has only just begun. A study published in the Astronomical Journal in 2020 estimated that the total number of Goldilocks-zone planets in the Milky Way is at least 300m, and possibly as high as 6bn.

Astronomy has made enormous progress in filling in the first three variables in the Drake equation. The difficulty, as the astronomer Sara Seager has written, is



An artist's impression of Kepler-452b

NASA/REUTERS

> **It is possible that progress is self-limiting: any species powerful enough to escape its planet is powerful enough to destroy it**

that "the first three factors … are measurable; the other four are not, and arguably never will be".

The closest we can come to answering Drake's fourth question – how many planets actually develop life – is to look for biosignatures, chemical compounds in the atmosphere of an exoplanet that on Earth are associated with the presence of life. In 2025, researchers announced they had found dimethyl sulfide in the atmosphere of K2-18b, an exoplanet in the habitable zone of a star 124 light years from Earth. Because that compound is produced on Earth by ocean plankton, it could be a sign of the presence of organic life. But the finding was quickly challenged by other scientists, who argued the data did not prove the presence of dimethyl sulfide.

K2-18b is a good example of the limits of astrobiology. To find an exoplanet is very difficult; to find one in the Goldilocks zone is even harder; to detect potential biosignatures is harder still. And even if biosignatures were to be definitively confirmed, it would only show that life may exist. There is no way to know whether it actually does, much less what form it takes.

The search for exoplanets is radically expanding our understanding of the cosmos. "We have learned that the universe is teeming with a fascinating variety of planets, more types than we could have imagined," writes the astrobiologist Lisa Kaltenegger. But so far, it has found exactly as many extraterrestrials as radio astronomy has: zero. The more we learn about the universe, the more acute the Fermi paradox becomes.

To explain this "great silence", researchers focus on the last three variables in the Drake equation: on planets where life exists, how often does an intelligent species like humanity evolve? Of intelligent species, how many develop the technological ability to send radio signals into space? And finally, how long does a transmitting civilisation last before it disappears?

These questions go beyond the limits of astronomy; they can't be answered, even in principle, by developing more sensitive telescopes. The only way to shed light on them would be to assemble a catalogue of species across the cosmos and study their history. But the reason we have to ask Drake's questions in the first place is that we don't have such a catalogue.

In practice, then, thinking about extraterrestrial intelligence means thinking about the only intelligent species we do know – ourselves. What conditions had to exist for *Homo sapiens* to evolve and develop spacefaring technology, and how long can we expect technological civilisation in its current form to survive?

Of the seven variables in the equation, Drake and his colleagues found that last one, which they called "L" (for "length of time"), the hardest to calculate, offering a range of estimates from 1,000 to 100m years. This uncertainty reflects the fact that L is essentially a prediction about the future of humanity. As long as ours is the only technological civilisation we know about, we have no way to estimate the longevity of such civilisations except to think about how long ours can be expected to last. And there is a good reason to think this may not be a long time. The birth of radio astronomy and space flight coincided with the invention of nuclear weapons; the same rocket technology that sent astronauts to the moon was used to build intercontinental ballistic missiles. Human beings have managed to avoid destroying ourselves in a nuclear war for the past 80 years, but it would be a bold prophet who would guarantee that we will not do so in the next 80, not to speak of the next 800. It is possible that technological progress is self-limiting: any species powerful enough to escape its planet is powerful enough to destroy it.

Drake thought that multiplying all the variables in his equation would yield about 50,000 transmitting civilisations in our galaxy. If the true number turns out to be just one, it follows that at least one of those variables must have a much lower value than expected. In other words, there must be one or more steps in the evolution of advanced civilisation that are very difficult to surmount.

As the economist Robin Hanson wrote in an influential 1998 paper, "There is a 'great filter' along the path between simple dead stuff and explosive life." For some reason, "the vast vast majority of stuff that starts along this path never makes it. In fact, so far nothing among the billion trillion stars in our whole past universe has made it all the way along this path."

Like the Drake equation, the great filter offers a structure for thinking about what makes technological civilisation possible. Any answer to that question involves astronomy, physics and biology. It also leads to questions about human nature and destiny that have traditionally been the province of philosophy and religion.

That certain physical conditions are necessary for the development of life has been recognised for a long time: distance from the sun, the presence of water, a breathable atmosphere. But there are a multitude of other cosmic coincidences that may be equally necessary for life to develop and survive. For instance, any planet that is regularly bombarded by asteroids would find it difficult to sustain life for long. When a single asteroid about six miles in diameter struck the Yucatán peninsula 66m years ago, it is thought to have extinguished three-quarters of all existing species, including the non-avian dinosaurs.

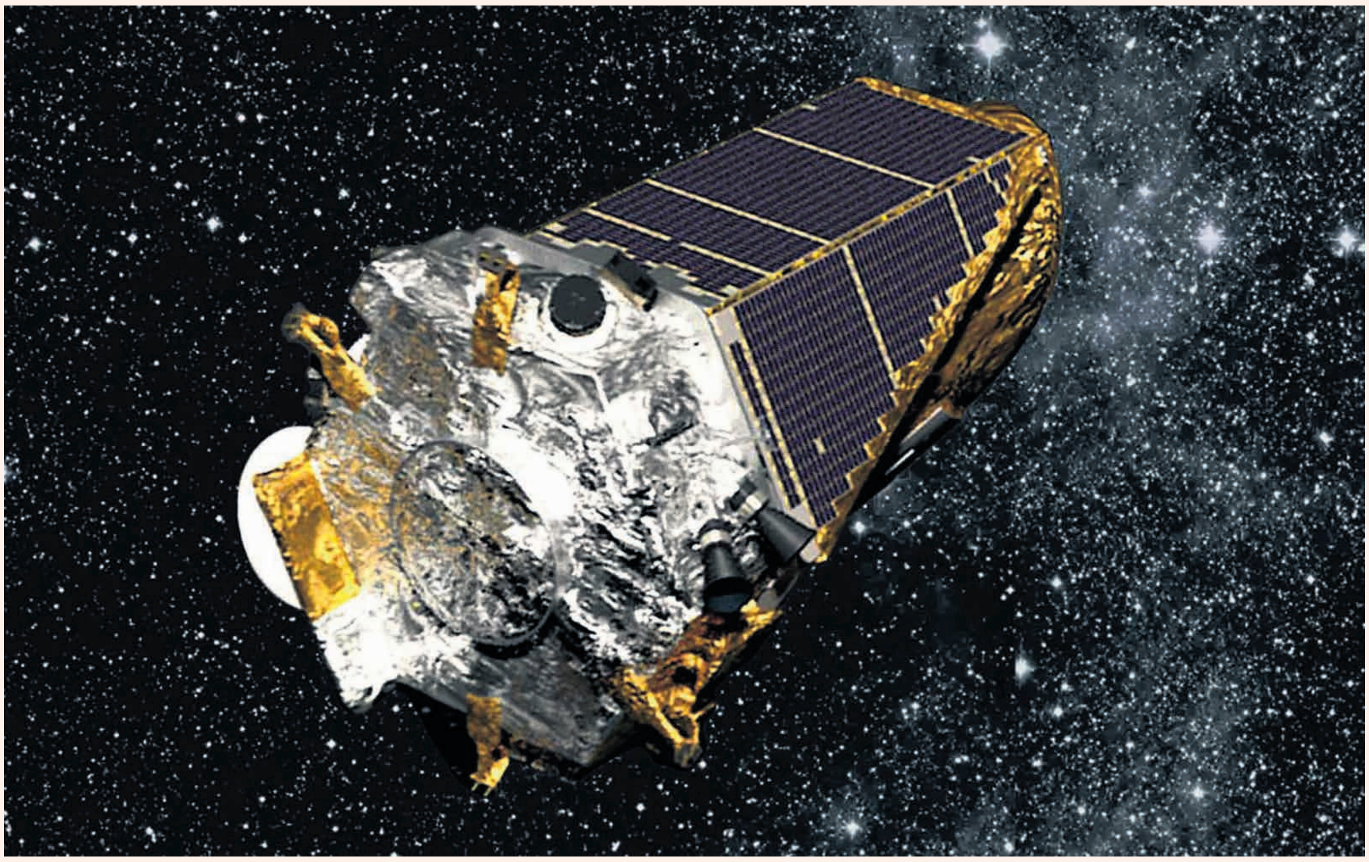
Such impacts would be much more common if not for the presence of Jupiter, a giant planet just the right distance from Earth to intercept comets and asteroids. A Jupiter-like neighbour may be a prerequisite for advanced life, since on a planet without one, the clock of evolution would be continually reset by mass extinctions.

Then there is the role of plate tectonics. The Earth's surface is broken into large plates that drift very slowly over time. At their fault lines, old rock made of carbon is drawn into the planet's hot interior and new rock is produced in the form of magma. This "conveyor belt" has the effect of stabilising the level of carbon in the atmosphere, preventing runaway heating or cooling that could extinguish life.

Geologists aren't certain why Earth has tectonic plates – the current best theory is that the decay of radioactive elements in the interior of the planet produces heat that melts subsurface rock. But ours is the only planet in the solar system to have them. Mars and Venus, which are rocky and about the same size as Earth, have rigid surfaces that don't break into separate masses. So it's possible that plate tectonics, too, belongs on the list of prerequisites for life.

The more conditions life needs, the easier it is to whittle down the galaxy's 100bn planets as potential homes for it. The "rare-Earth hypothesis", writes the Serbian astrophysicist Milan Ćirković, holds that "each of these requirements [for life] is unlikely and they are (or at least seem to be) causally independent, so that their combination is bound to be incredibly rare and probably unique in the Milky Way".

Life on Earth seems to have emerged fairly quickly after the planet was formed; the oldest bacteria are only a few hundred million years younger than the solar system. This seems like an encouraging sign that, under the right conditions, it is easy for life to get started. But after those



An artist's impression of the Kepler space telescope

ZUMA/ALAMY

early beginnings, major evolutionary milestones came very slowly. It took about 2bn years for the first cellular nucleus to develop, enabling the transition from primitive prokaryotic bacteria to more advanced eukaryotes. Another billion years passed before the emergence of the first multicellular organisms.

Strikingly, genetic evidence shows that each of these crucial developments occurred only once in the history of life on Earth. This suggests that they may not be inevitable stages that life would pass through anywhere, but surpassingly rare accidents. Life may exist on other planets in the form of archaea - unicellular organisms that can thrive in extreme conditions - without ever evolving as far as sponges, much less plants and animals.

As for mammals like ourselves, our reign on Earth is also highly contingent. Dinosaurs were our planet's dominant species for more than 150m years. By comparison, *Homo sapiens* has existed for only about 300,000 years, 0.006% of the history of Earth. When we look back on the history of humanity from this point of view, we seem to see ourselves perched on a toppling Jenga tower of incredible coincidences. So many factors had to line up perfectly for us to come into existence; change just one and we would not be here. The effect is vertiginous, reminding us that everything we take for granted about our world is in fact radically contingent. Not only do life and human life not need to exist; it would be immensely more reasonable for them not to exist.

In centuries past, some thinkers came to a similar conclusion and saw it as proof of providence, which shaped the finely tuned structure of the cosmos to foster the evolution of humanity. Today, rather than turning to old supernatural doctrines to explain human uniqueness, a new generation of cosmologists argues that we need to radically expand our idea of the forms life and intelligence might take, and how we should go about looking for them.

Seti operates on the premise that we will find aliens because they want to be found. It looks for radio signals sent deliberately into space with the goal of attracting attention from civilisations advanced enough to detect them. The Project Cyclops report argues that "the sending race will attempt to make the job of deciphering and understanding the messages as simple and foolproof as possible".

This assumption reflects the optimism of the space age, when humanity landed on the moon and gazed into deep space for the first time. Having accomplished so much so fast, it was natural to believe that other intelligent species would be equally venturesome. Wouldn't they want to end their cosmic loneliness as much as we do?

One hypothesis suggests aliens are invisible to us because they have transcended bodily existence as we understand it

Such ideas about how aliens would act are fundamentally anthropocentric, imagining that any intelligent species would be driven by the same motives we are: love of knowledge and love of power. But there is no reason why intelligent life elsewhere in the universe should have evolved to resemble us, either physically or mentally.

In a 2016 paper titled The "Hard Problem" of Life, physicists Sara Imari Walker and Paul Davies observe that "both astrobiology and our assumptions about non-human consciousness tend to be biased by our understanding of terrestrial life". We take for granted that the particular forms that evolved on Earth - "from the level of cells, to multicellular organisms, to eusocial and linguistic societies" - are the inevitable product of natural laws, so that something like them must emerge anywhere life exists. But Walker and Davies argue that, in fact, life as we know it is the product of "a combination of chance and necessity", including many unlikely events that pushed the evolution of life on to new pathways.

Rather than expect all living things to look like us, with arms and legs and rocket ships and radio telescopes, Walker and Davies propose that we think about life in a new way, defining it in functional terms as "the actual physical mechanism that permits information to gain causal purchase over matter". On Earth, information is encoded physically in DNA strands and synaptic impulses; elsewhere in the cosmos, it might take such different forms that we wouldn't recognise it even if we found it.

This idea fascinated the 20th-century Polish science-fiction writer Stanisław Lem, who dramatised it in a number of novels and stories. In his best-known book, Solaris, humanity discovers a planet covered by a sentient ocean. The second chapter, The Solarists, is an elaborate imaginary history of scientific debates about this organism, which resembles a "syrupy jelly". Is it a "primitive being" or a "highly organised structure"? Had it bypassed "all the terrestrial stages of development - that is to say, the emergence of protozoa and metazoa, plant and animal evolution" - yet still managed to become intelligent?

The novel develops into a kind of horror-thriller, as astronauts marooned on Solaris are stalked by bizarre apparitions. But these aren't ghosts; they are attempts by the ocean-being to communicate with the visitors by reading their minds and adopting the shapes it finds there. The ocean itself seems to think by creating elaborate shapes and structures with its gelatinous waves. But the human visitors are totally unable to grasp the meaning of these movements. The real tragedy of Solaris isn't the gruesome deaths of the scientists, but what one of them calls "the failure to make contact, the lack of response".

More recently, theorists and storytellers - a distinction that often blurs when it comes to thinking about aliens - have begun to speculate that what separates us from extraterrestrials isn't different biologies. Rather, biology itself may be a primitive phase in the development of mind, which truly advanced civilisations inevitably outgrow. After all, the most impressive technological achievements of the 21st century have not been in space exploration, but in computing, which allows us to create ever more detailed and powerful models of the world. If this progress continues, we have begun to worry, artificial intelligence and virtual reality could replace human intelligence and material reality.

Perhaps this is why we have so far failed to find traces of alien life. When intelligent species are sufficiently advanced, maybe their goal isn't colonising planets, but escaping physical existence altogether. John Smart, a non-academic futurist who describes his work as "acceleration studies", calls this the "transcension hypothesis": aliens are invisible to us because they have transcended bodily existence as we currently understand it.

Presenting this idea in a 2012 paper, Smart speculated that as civilisations develop "more computation and simulation abilities", they will expand not into outer space but into "inner space", creating virtual realities more complex and interesting than physical reality. On Earth, computers have become ever more compact as they grow more powerful; so it makes sense to assume that the material substrate of alien virtual realities - the hardware on which the software of consciousness runs - will come to occupy less and less physical space. Ultimately, Smith argues, this process could yield a technology so compact that it will essentially disappear from the map of the cosmos.

The transcension hypothesis, like the cold war-era idea of galactic colonisation, is a kind of presentism, assuming that whatever is happening now will continue to happen in the future, only more so. It elevates the computer revolution of the 21st century to a universal process that every technological civilisation will follow.

But in thinking about extraterrestrial life, it's hard to see how some degree of anthropocentrism and presentism can be avoided. In the absence of actual data about aliens, thinking about them is an act of imagination, and the only material our imaginations have to work with is our own experience. As our understanding of our species changes, so does our sense of what is probable or possible for our cosmic "others". Just as accounts of UFO encounters are human testimonies, not scientific evidence, so all our thinking about aliens and how to find them is best understood as humanity's evolving self-portrait. ●

Adapted from We Want to Believe: How Aliens Went Mainstream and Why It Matters, published by Columbia Global Reports on 25 August. To order for £12.99, go to bookshop.theguardian.com. P&P may apply.

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Letters

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Established 1906

Country diary

Stoney Middleton, Derbyshire

I could already hear the noises of appreciation as I walked up the lane towards St Martin's church. "Oh *yes*," I heard a woman say. "That's lovely." Turning before the lych gate, I spotted a small knot of people standing in front of a small and apparently ancient stone basin on which rested the white frame of this year's well dressing.

The tradition of well dressing, strong in the Peak District, gives thanks for a community's supply of safe water and is currently celebrated in more than a dozen villages across Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Given how the drought has left pastures surrounding Stoney Middleton brown and exhausted, this annual event seems more pertinent than ever.

In the remote past, villagers would simply arrange a few flowers around the well, and the stone basin at Stoney does have some flowerpots placed near it. The main event now, though, is an elaborate design fashioned largely from stones and flower petals pressed into clay, all supported by a substantial wooden frame – an Anglican riff on a Tibetan Buddhist mandala.

Well dressings often take a religious theme, but last year Stoney Middleton honoured the conservation campaigner Ethel Haythornthwaite. This year the image featured a barn owl perched in a tree with the full moon behind its spectral form. The night sky, I could see, was made from hydrangea petals, with feathers and wisps of wool filling out the owl's body. And yes, it *was* lovely; all credit to the designers Joy Mason and Amanda Grimes, and their team of volunteers.

Stepping back, I noticed another well dressing off to one side. This was the work of the village's children and featured nine images of animals, including a monkey, pandas giant and red, and a penguin. In the right-hand bottom corner was the figure of a man lying down, with what appeared to be a gorilla looming over him, and the text alongside explained that this dressing was themed for the 100th birthday of David Attenborough. It's only a guess, but I think he'd like it.

Ed Douglas

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Mental health: one step forward and two back?

It's very encouraging to hear the announcement about the new network of community mental health clinics in England (Editorial, 7 August). The focus on early intervention is crucial, as it means that people can access treatment as early as possible, rather than waiting for their mental health to reach a crisis point. The centres should improve access, reaching people where they are. The government should make sure that they meaningfully involve people with lived experience of mental health problems to ensure the centres are co-designed and co-led with them.

As your editorial says, parity between mental and physical healthcare became a policy goal in 2011. Mental health is an issue that unites us. According to new research, which we commissioned from More in Common, nearly three-quarters of the public believe that mental health is as important as physical health, most people are comfortable talking about it, and support for early intervention is high across the political spectrum. Three-quarters also say the government should do more to improve services.

The centres are an important step forward, but the government needs to make sure that people can access the many new and improved mental health interventions that have the potential to transform lives. New evidence-based mental health treatments must be rigorously evaluated, adopted and made available across the NHS. This will help people get the right treatment at the right time, and lead fulfilling lives.

Dr Kate Martin
Head of field building and lived experience, Wellcome Trust

● While the announcement of a new initiative on early access to mental health care must be welcomed, there is a danger that without a parallel programme on mental health promotion, it could compound an already disastrous situation by uncovering massive further unmet need.

A public health approach to mental health is long overdue. I refer to one which takes its cues from the history of tuberculosis, the "captain of the men of death" that was brought under control not by pharmaceuticals alone, but by paying attention to the environmental conditions that predisposed to transmission.

The initial prescription for action was written 60 years ago by the Manchester psychiatrist Gerald Caplan, who identified how those with psychiatric training might best be deployed to build population-level mental health resilience through their support in the community, school, places of work and recreation; in Caplan's blueprint, clinical work was only one aspect of the daily round of the psychiatrist and their team.

The forthcoming mental health strategy is an opportunity to grasp this nettle; for too long these opportunities have been missed.

Prof Dr John R Ashton
Former president, Faculty of Public Health

● Your report (NHS trust plans to cut 330 mental health jobs, 3 August) is concerning. As the NHS faces yet another reconfiguration, patients and staff can only look forward to an uncertain future as not only this trust but other mental health trusts are expected to make savings to already impoverished levels of care. This is in stark contrast to the recent announcement of a major expansion of community mental health support in England.

Successive governments have insisted that mental health should be given the same priority as physical health, yet each year psychiatric services undergo ever more cuts to funding, services and beds. This has left people with minimal help and nowhere to go in times of loneliness or crisis.

Marjorie Wallace
Chief executive, Sane

An experience of poverty we can learn from

Adrian Chiles's emotional response to Poor by Katriona O'Sullivan really resonated with me (I've never cried during a live broadcast – until now, 30 July). I read it and my heart both sobbed and cheered for Katriona's younger self and the woman she has become.

With its linear narrative, rich cultural references and "rags-to-riches" form, it might be taken for a tale of "that was then but this is now". However, the defining part of the book is the epilogue, making clear that Katriona's account of growing up in grinding, abject poverty is a story of then *and* now.

Every day, countless Katrionas enter schools with "pissy pants" and empty bellies, their nervous systems on high alert, in fight, flight or freeze.

School is a place to survive, not thrive. I know, because I have worked in a primary school for over 20 years. I provide mental health support to vulnerable children and their equally vulnerable and disadvantaged families.

My job is not to educate, but to help make children feel seen, heard, cared for and valued – to try to reduce the stigma attached to being poor ie, the misconception that having less means being less.

Reading Poor reinforced the vastness and complexity of poverty as an issue – it can feel "too big". But that doesn't prevent each of us from treating others with dignity, respect and kindness, noticing when someone is struggling, is hungry, dirty or alone, and offering a supportive hand.

Pollyanna-ish? I don't think so. It was heart-warming and affirming to read about the lasting, positive impact certain school staff had on Katriona. When school reopens in September, my copy of Poor will be available in the staffroom – anyone who works in a school (or indeed anyone at all) should read it.

Sarah Schofield
Whitefield, Greater Manchester

Cricket fiction isn't in a 'bucolic dreamworld'

Your leader (One village scandal reveals how cricket's moral code has always bent easily, 31 July) recycles the persistent caricature of Siegfried Sassoon's, Hugh de Sélincourt's and AG Macdonell's cricket fiction as existing in a "bucolic dreamworld".

Sassoon's The Flower Show Match is set against the background of the Boer war, with recurring references to the relief of Ladysmith. The home umpire is also suspected of using his wooden leg to make dents in the pitch.

In De Sélincourt's The Cricket Match, a war profiteer has felled the fir trees surrounding the Tillingford ground to have them sawn into pit props. The club is struggling to recover from the war, and there's a feeling of "melancholy certainty that each season must surely be the last". There are passing references to the Russian Revolution, and the hope expressed by the lady of the manor that village cricket will ease class antagonism is contradicted by the contempt the team's fast bowler, a labourer, feels for her public-school son who also plays for Tillingford.

Macdonell's England, Their England is pervaded with the after-effects of the first world war. Its Scottish protagonist who is inquiring into the vaunted English principle of "team spirit" said to characterise the national game is none the wiser after a day spent with a motley team of metropolitan writers and publishers playing away in a Kent village.

Rod Edmond
Author of Cricket, Fiction and Nation

Corrections and clarifications

● An article (Mystery over world's oldest leader after 53-day absence, 31 July, p28) said that Paul Biya, the president of Cameroon, and his wife, Chantal, had not been seen publicly since 7 June. However, Cameroon's first lady was seen at the World Cup final on 19 July.

● The village of Waterbeach is north, not south, of Cambridge (Labour's housing plans now at risk as water supplies dwindle, 1 August, p34).

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Unfair breast cancer screening guidelines

Calls for changes to breast cancer guidelines for GPs are welcome (Report, 4 August). The existing guidelines are irrational. If your grandmother and mother have both had breast cancer, you are still not added to the intensified screening list unless an aunt or great-aunt or sister has also had breast cancer. Hence the system discriminates against families – like mine – with only one woman in a generation.

Helen Hills
York

● It seems that Anna Tims's correspondent committed the wrong environmental crime (I got £500 fine for putting cup in bag next to full bin, 1 August). Instead of unwittingly littering, they should have dumped thousands of tonnes of sewage into a river and bagged a multimillion-pound reward.

Matt Sheard
Tayport, Fife

● As a interested follower of the regular letters from the owner of the Gordon Bennett, I offer my sympathies for the loss of his wife and share his frustration at the uncooperative stance of the Canal and River Trust (Letters, 10 July). I write this on the anniversary of my own wife's death.

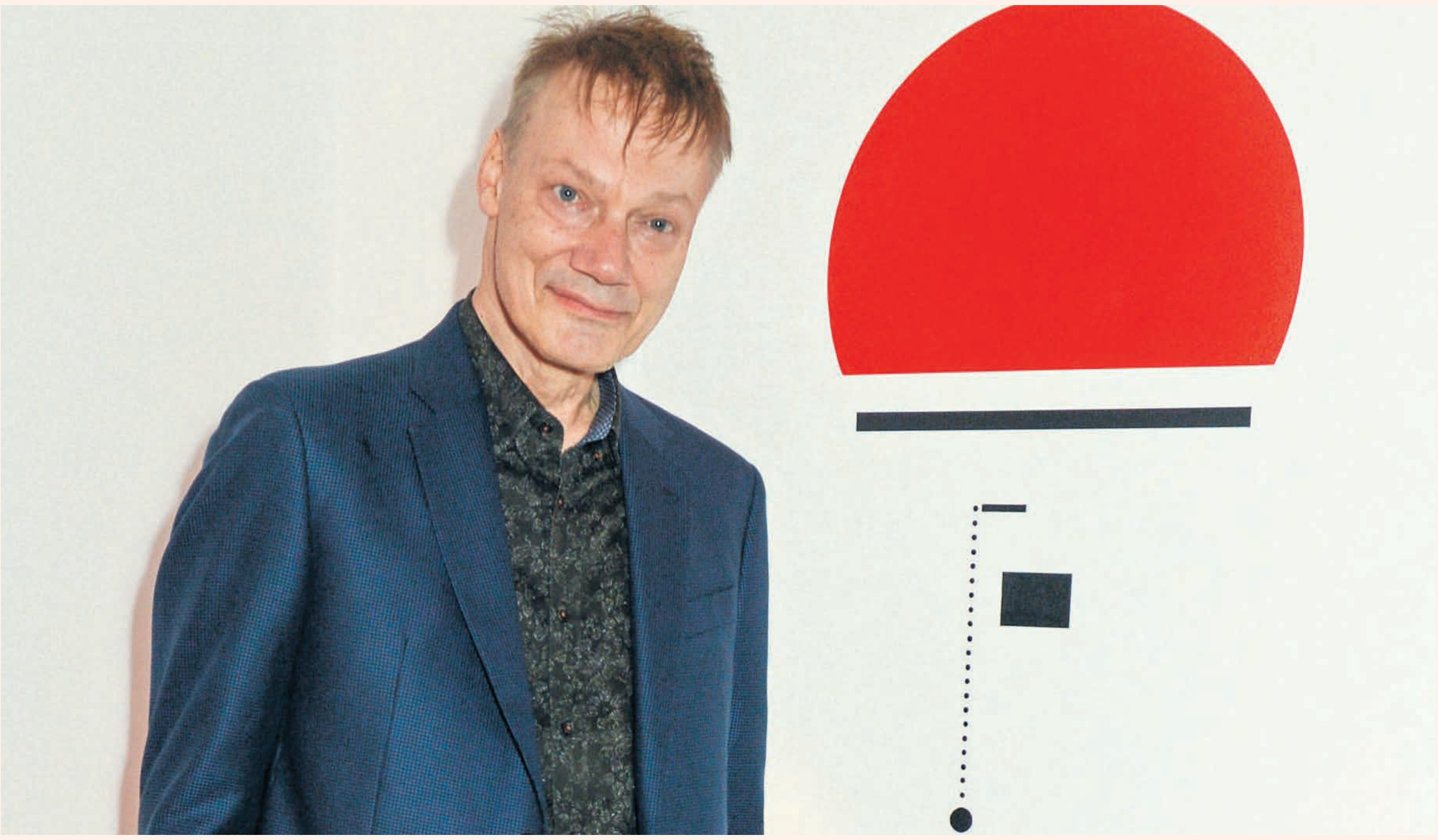
JK Mitchell
Dinton, Buckinghamshire

● Commiserations to Ian Grieve on board the Gordon Bennett. He could add to the Nick Cave/Neil Young playlist celebrating his wife's life. Cave's The Ship Song and Young's Birds are sad but also uplifting, like his letter.

Jim Hatley
Brighton, East Sussex

● My mother used to say people with short or long illnesses (Letters, 8 August) "enjoyed ill health".

Rory Murphy
London



William Orbit

Musician and producer regarded as the genius behind the relaunch of Madonna's career in 1998

The career highlights of William Orbit, who has died aged 69, would run to several pages, featuring collaborations with Robbie Williams, All Saints, Prince, Kraftwerk, Britney Spears, Beth Orton and U2, but one of the most celebrated was his partnership with Madonna on her 1998 album Ray of Light.

Coming at a point when Madonna had starred in the film of Evita and had her first child, Lourdes, and her music career seemed to be waning, Ray of Light marked a decisive step into a new world of techno and ambient music. Orbit, who had previously made remixes of Madonna's Justify My Love and Erotica, proved to be the perfect production partner, and Ray of Light's blend of styles made it one of Madonna's most admired achievements, with 16m copies of the album sold worldwide.

"I kind of revere her really, as an individual to work with, as a colleague and as a boss," Orbit said. "She's also a collaborator. There's never a dull moment." Ray of Light earned Orbit two Grammys, and he won another for his work on the song Beautiful Stranger (1999), performed by Madonna and co-written with Orbit for the Austin Powers film The Spy Who Shagged Me.

Also in 1999 Orbit produced Blur's album 13, which saw the band making a big effort to break free from their Britpop origins, and the debut solo album of the Spice Girl Mel C, Northern Star.

The stars had evidently aligned perfectly for Orbit in 1999, since this was also the year when his solo album Pieces in a Modern Style reached No 2 on the UK chart. This was a selection of classical compositions filtered through Orbit's electronic treatments.

His version of Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings gave him a No 4 hit on the UK singles chart in a remix version by the Dutch DJ Ferry Corsten. Corsten said that Orbit "challenged convention, embraced the unexpected and created sounds that felt years ahead of their time".

He was born William Wainwright in Shoreditch, east London, the elder son of parents who were both schoolteachers. Classical music was the habitual soundtrack in the Wainwright household.

William attended Minchenden grammar school in Southgate, north London, but as the biography on his website puts it: "At the age of 15 he chose to leave formal education in favour of being self- and world-taught." Years of travelling around Britain and Europe found him "living in squats, fruit-picking in Norfolk and Evesham, Worcestershire, and on a grain barge in the Netherlands".

He worked as a builder and a hospital porter, and even a trainee draughtsman at Humphreys and Glasgow, a company that designed offshore oil rigs. His musical adventures began with his learning the guitar, which led to him busking in London and Paris, and also becoming good enough to play lunchtime gigs at the King's Head pub in Islington, north London.

However, his destiny would not be shaped by the guitar but by his aptitude for exploiting the new world of electronic music, synthesisers and galloping advances in recording technology.

He took a decisive step in 1980 when he formed the group Torch Song with Grant Gilbert and Laurie Mayer. Based at a disused school in Notting Hill, dubbed the Centro Iberico, between 1984 and 1987 they released three albums of music in an ambient-electronica vein, Wish Thing, Ecstasy and Exhibit A. Their track Prepare to Energize was featured in the 1984 Tom Hanks film Bachelor Party. Having disbanded, Torch Song reformed in the mid-1990s and released Toward the Unknown Region (1995).

Orbit attending the launch of a new weekly arts night entitled The Architects Underground at the RIBA in central London, 2019. Right, with Madonna after winning awards for her Ray of Light album at the Grammys in 1999

NICKY J SIMS/GETTY; YOUTUBE

> **Sound is like putty, it's elastic. You can do anything with it**

Miles Copeland, who had signed them to his IRS Records label, said of Orbit: "He's one of the few people I've met whom I'd describe as a genius. He had an awareness of playing with space and time that I've only heard in one act before, and that was Pink Floyd." Orbit himself said that "sound is like putty, it's elastic. You can do anything with it."

In 1979, Orbit and Mayer had founded Guerilla Studios, which would be the base for Orbit's label, Guerilla Records. Artists who recorded at Guerilla included the Cocteau Twins, Howard Devoto, Erasure, the Fall, Gary Numan and Sting. In 1988 Orbit also collaborated with the comedians Harry Enfield, Paul Whitehouse and Charlie Higson on the single Loadsamoney (Doin' Up the House), which became Orbit's first hit record when it reached No 4.

It was typical of Orbit's unconventional career that, after decades in the popular music business, it was only after he turned 60 that he suffered traumatic experiences with drugs.

He had been living in Los Angeles, but returned to London in 2017, then moved to Chipping Norton in the Cotswolds. A surfeit of cocaine and a selection of mind-altering products prompted a breakdown that led to his being sectioned for 28 days.

In a 2022 interview with Channel 4's Krishnan Guru-Murthy, coinciding with the release of his album The Painter, he described how he was feeling happy and creative again after "I had four pretty awful years. There was a lot of lifestyle awfulness, some of which I brought on myself, some of which was fate. Stuff that just happens all stacked up to the point where I was unhappy."

The album title reflected the fact that Orbit was also a talented artist, having begun painting while on a stop-smoking retreat in Nevada where he attended "vino and Van Gogh" adult art classes.

"You turn up, get drunk and mess around with cheap acrylics," he put it, with characteristic self-effacement.

Adam Sweeting

William Orbit (William Mark Wainwright), musician, composer and producer, born 15 December 1956; died 23 July 2026

Louise Lasser

American actor who made her name in the satirical sitcom Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman

The ebullient actor Louise Lasser, who has died aged 87, played a harried Ohio housewife dealing with extreme events (drug addiction, mass murder, drowning-by-soup) in Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman, a satirical sitcom that doubled as a spoof of daytime soap operas.

Like the target of its mockery, the show aired five times a week in the US, so that its modest two-season run, between 1976 and 1977, produced a staggering 325 episodes. UK audiences were treated to just nine of them in 1980; a 38-disc DVD box set was released in 2013.

That role made Lasser a household name in the US. She was known more widely elsewhere as a fixture of several early, goofy films by Woody Allen, to whom she was married for four years. He called her "charming, smart as a whip, quick, very funny and witty".

She is seen briefly as a giddy interviewee in a vox pop scene in Take the Money and Run (1969), Allen's mockumentary about a hare-brained bank robber. In Bananas (1971), she played Nancy, the earnest social activist who inspires Allen's character to join the revolution in a fictional Latin American country. A sex scene between them is staged like a sporting event, complete with commentary from the real-life sports broadcaster Howard Cosell.

An attempted breakup conversation becomes amusingly circuitous when Nancy struggles to articulate exactly why she wants to end the relationship: "Maybe if you could guess a few things … ?" Lasser's vague dottiness is the ideal foil for Allen's neurotic bluster.

She made a notable contribution to Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (*But Were Afraid to Ask) (1972), which comprises seven irreverent sketches inspired by the popular sex manual of the same name. Lasser appeared as a woman who can only climax in public; the vignette, entitled "Why Do Some Women Have Trouble Reaching an Orgasm?", was a parody of chic Italian arthouse cinema.

Allen had considered dropping the sequence at script stage. She argued for keeping it, and pointed out that it would be more effective played "with rich modern Italians" than in the rough-and-ready neorealist style he had envisaged. "I hear footsteps in a large corridor and I see Ferraris and that kind of thing," she said. Allen recalled resisting at first: "Then all of a sudden the name Antonioni started flashing and I said, 'Yes'". The pair delivered their dialogue in phonetic Italian, with English subtitles running beneath them.

She was born in New York, to Paula (nee Cohen), an interior decorator, and Sol Lasser, an accountant and author who wrote a successful series of guides to income tax. Her background was one of privilege. "While I was growing up on linoleum eating Del Monte string beans out of a can," wrote Allen, "she was knocking off escargot on Fifth Avenue."

Lasser in the makeup chair getting ready to record an episode of Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman in 1976
JOHN G ZIMMERMAN ARCHIVE/EVERETT/SHUTTERSTOCK

She was educated at Fieldston school and at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, where she studied political science until depression forced her to drop out. Encouraged by her experience of performing in friends' shows while at Brandeis, she took acting classes with Sanford Meisner and found work in commercials and on stage.

She and Allen met in 1958, when he was still with his first wife, Harlene Rosen. They began a relationship in 1960 and were married six years later. Both their careers were gathering momentum. Allen, then a standup, credited Lasser's "instinct and faith" with encouraging him to submit humorous pieces to the New Yorker magazine, where he became a regular contributor.

> **"She was charming, smart as a whip, quick, very funny and witty,' said Woody Allen, to whom Lasser was married for four years**

Meanwhile, Lasser understudied Barbra Streisand in the original 1962 Broadway production of the musical I Can Get It for You Wholesale. "Streisand was electric," she said. "She stopped the show, and then when I did it no one knew when a song was over."

In 1967, she starred with Don Ameche in Henry, Sweet Henry, a short-lived Broadway musical version of the Peter Sellers comedy The World of Henry Orient.

On screen, she appeared with Alan Alda in The Laughmakers (1962), Allen's sitcom pilot about an improv group. She had a cameo as a massage therapist rubbing Sellers's back in What's New Pussycat? (1965), which Allen wrote and starred in. She was one of eight credited writers and part of the voice cast on What's Up, Tiger Lily? (1966), Allen's comic redubbing of a Japanese spy thriller.

They divorced in 1970 but remained friends. She had an uncredited cameo as a chaotic secretary in his comedy-drama Stardust Memories (1980).

The punishing workload and schedule of Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman left Lasser exhausted; the producers took up her suggestion that Mary should suffer a nervous breakdown. "This was equivalent to America's nervous breakdown that we were all starting to go through," she said in 2013. "I thought she was like a survivor that lived in a world that might not be worth surviving." The show's humour, she said, "came from a great angst inside".

After quitting the sitcom, she wrote and starred in a TV movie, the road-trip comedy Just Me and You (1978), with Charles Grodin. She had guest spots in TV series including Taxi (1980-82) and St Elsewhere (1984), and in films such as Crimewave (1985), co-written by the Coen brothers, and the exploitation horror Frankenhooker (1990).

She was in Todd Solondz's taboo-busting black comedy Happiness (1998) and Darren Aronofsky's addiction drama Requiem for a Dream (2000). She played a suicidal artist in three episodes of Lena Dunham's hit HBO series Girls (2014-15). Dunham had tracked down the elusive actor by asking Twitter users for her whereabouts.

The faltering progress of Lasser's career can be blamed partly on some daunting personal traumas. In 1964, her mother took her own life (Lasser had prevented one of her earlier suicide attempts). Her father later died the same way.

Lasser's own mental health was fragile at best. She suffered nervous breakdowns as well as extended periods of poor physical health. In his 2020 memoir Apropos of Nothing, Allen wonders "just how huge a star she could have been if she'd never had to fight an uphill battle all the way".

Her struggles, including an arrest for cocaine possession, were alluded to in parts of Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman and in a 1976 appearance on Saturday Night Live. Her relationship with her mother was also said to have inspired the fraught family dynamic in Allen's solemn chamber-piece Interiors (1978).

Though she was evidently quite unwell in her final screen appearance in Funny Pages (2022), in which she is glimpsed as a volatile, rheumy-eyed customer demanding Percocet in a pharmacy, Lasser's eccentric comic force and precision timing remained miraculously undimmed.

She is survived by her partner, Michael Citriniti.

Ryan Gilbey

Louise Lasser, actor, born 11 April 1939; died 6 July 2026

Birthdays

Prof Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, cognitive neuroscientist, 52; **Don Boyd**, film director, 78; **Sir Geoffrey Cass**, former chair, Royal Shakespeare Company, 94; **Simon Clegg**, sports executive, 67; **Viola Davis**, actor, 61; **Peter Eisenman**, architect, 94; **Susan Golombok**, emeritus professor of family research, Cambridge University, 72; **Chris Hemsworth**, actor, 43; **Mike Hugg**, musician, 84; **Lord (Anthony) Hughes of Ombersley**, former justice of the supreme court, 78; **Joe Jackson**, singer and musician, 72; **Ashley Jensen**, actor, 57; **James Mates**, broadcaster, 65; **Ian McDiarmid**, actor, 82; **John Micklethwait**, editor in chief, Bloomsberg News, 64; **Sophie Okonedo**, actor, 58; **Sinan Savaskan**, composer, 72; **Richard Scudamore**, former executive chair, Premier League, 67; **Dame Sue Street**, former senior civil servant, 77; **Jah Wobble**, musician, 68; **Steve Wozniak**, computer engineer and Apple co-founder, 76.

Puzzles

Yesterday's solutions

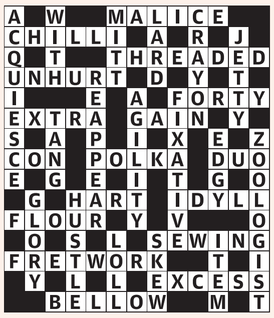
Killer sudoku
Easy

2	1	7	8	4	5	9	3	6
6	5	9	7	3	2	4	1	8
4	3	8	6	9	1	7	5	2
7	2	1	9	6	4	5	8	3
8	9	5	1	2	3	6	7	4
3	6	4	5	7	8	2	9	1
9	4	2	3	8	7	1	6	5
1	7	3	4	5	6	8	2	9
5	8	6	2	1	9	3	4	7

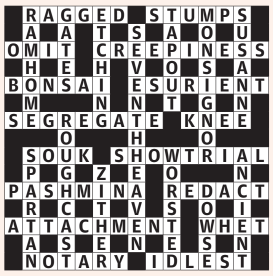
Medium

4	9	7	8	6	1	2	5	3
1	3	6	2	4	5	9	7	8
8	2	5	7	3	9	1	4	6
7	8	3	4	9	2	6	1	5
2	5	4	1	7	6	3	8	9
9	6	1	3	5	8	7	2	4
5	4	9	6	1	7	8	3	2
6	7	2	5	8	3	4	9	1
3	1	8	9	2	4	5	6	7

Codeword



Cryptic crossword
Solution No. 30,081



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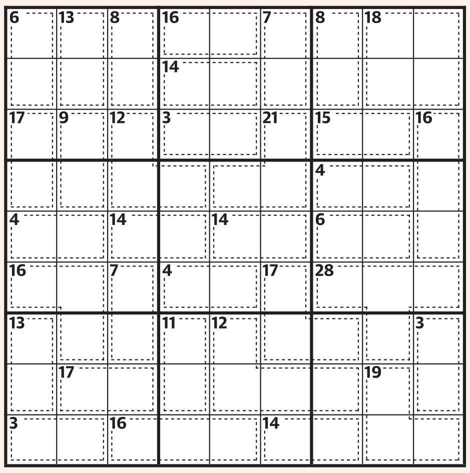
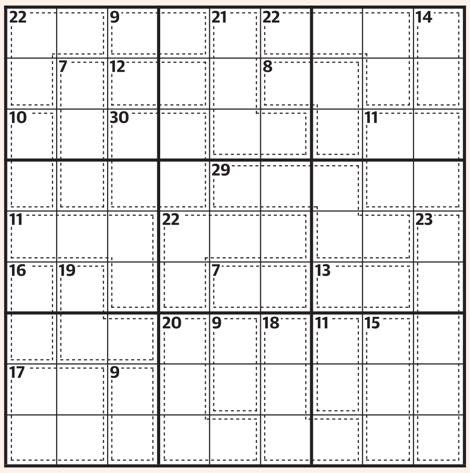
Killer sudoku

Easy

The normal rules of sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.

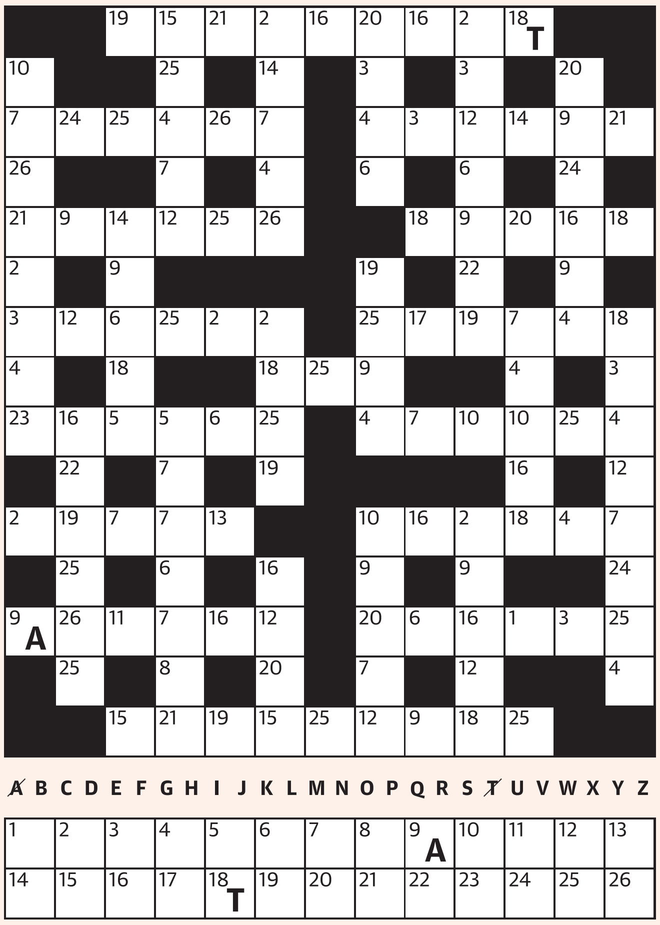


Medium

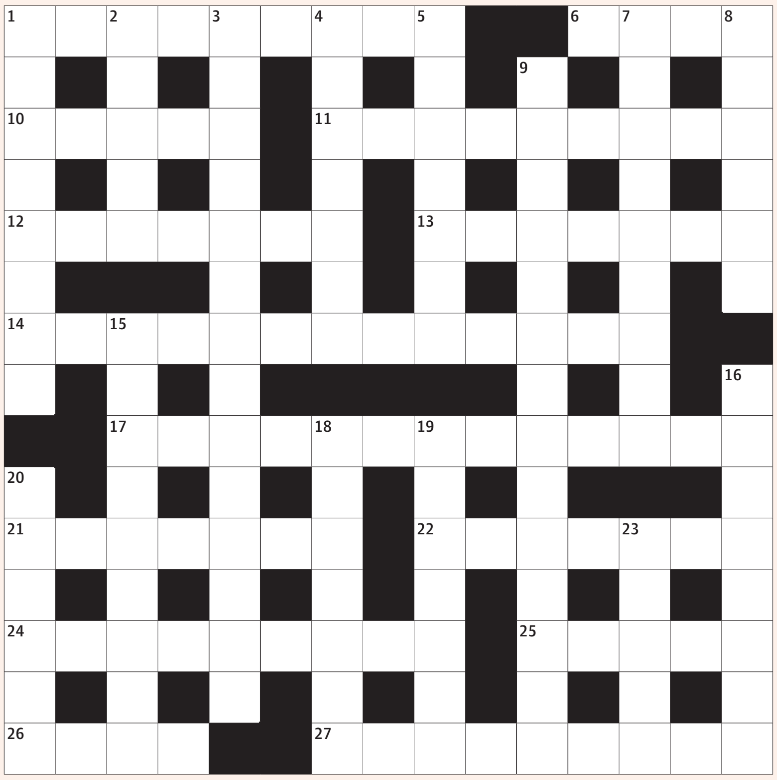


Codeword

Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.



Guardian cryptic crossword No 30,082 set by Anto



Across
1 Splitting payslip results in bad service? (4,5)
6 Occasional brewers who will deliver honey? (4)
10 Deceive friendly bank (5)
11 Gutsy Nero wrestled child (9)
12 Suckers taking shelter before short game (7)
13 Sacred music at heart of saintly shroud rite (7)
14 Acute harm horrible images aroused (7,6)
17 For example, Apple devices providing gambling opportunities (5,8)
21 Assigns blame when returning vegetarian food (7)
22 Chap so excited as couple make comeback in film (7)
24 Passes on instruction to tellers when bank heist's over (5,4)
25 All together now - express disappointment at what comes before do (5)
26 Sentimental short message made even shorter (4)
27 Catalogue standard no good bugs (7,2)

Down
1 One telling stories featuring fantastic, very minor celebrities (8)
2 Beneficial to add oxygen to blend (2,3)
3 Internal enemy in appropriate position here? (5,9)
4 Element of July's session is something hard to understand? (7)
5 Travel around Wigan central to find Portuguese wine (7)
7 Mrs Sprat's dietary requirement processed at lane one (3,2,4)
8 Gutted scientific programme providing containers for seed producers (6)
9 She made crime novels airtight as each evolved (6,8)
15 Endorsement after president would indicate top choice (9)
16 Conservative faction working to gather information for delivery option (1-7)
18 Labour adopts works creating best medium for growth (7)
19 In Scotland all large trees produce small flowers (7)
20 Trophies stolen, clubs eliminated - it's a result! (6)
23 Heads or livers chopped up? Depends how you say it (5)

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Life&Arts

Tuesday 11 August 2026

'Your body is not a temple. It's an amusement park'

How Anthony Bourdain inspired a generation of chefs – for good and ill

The Guardian

Zoe Williams
Anyone for an apprenticeship?
page 3

How we made
Hunt for the Wilderpeople
page 9

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PASS NOTES
№ 5,032

Kissing in public

Age: Kissing is 17m-21m years old – probably older than the notion of privacy.
Appearance: Romantic, uninhibited.
We don't approve of that here. Where?
You know, Britain. When I go to the cinema, I want the orgy to be on the screen. In fact, public kissing is very big right now among celebrity couples.
I think we have amassed enough evidence over the years to establish that celebrities simply don't know how to behave. Dua Lipa and Callum Turner, Kylie Jenner and Timothée Chalamet, Brooklyn Beckham and Nicola Peltz – they're all at it, kissing and cuddling for the cameras.
No good will come of this. That's where you're wrong. A new study, published in the journal Plos One, looked at 461 people in three countries – Poland, Nepal and Indonesia – all of which have negative attitudes towards public displays of affection, or PDAs. It found subjects who engaged in more PDAs reported higher relationship satisfaction.
Why would that be? "Because affectionate behaviour is one of the ways people communicate closeness, love and emotional connection," said the leader of the study, Dagna Kocur.
I still think it's just showing off. And icky. You don't think it's ever appropriate to kiss in public?
During a wedding ceremony, maybe, or at the end of a major world war, but otherwise it should remain behind closed doors. Fewer PDAs and more private displays, please! You're right, in a way: Kocur went on to point out that private displays of affection are even more strongly linked to relationship satisfaction, "so it may be worth making the time to hold hands and kiss at home, too".
At home, on the bus, in the bread aisle at Morrisons – don't these people ever get tired of pawing one another? A further study is now planned to include 1,000 people across nine countries, including the UK.
Good! We'll finally get to show the world how a persistent lack of affection builds character. Actually, it can lead to mental health problems.
What sort of mental health problems? A condition commonly known as skin hunger, which may cause anxiety, depression and alexithymia – an impairment of your ability to interpret emotion.
Relax, Casanova – you're not my type. A case, I think, in point.
Do say: "Physical affection, wherever it occurs, is essential to our wellbeing as humans."
Don't say: "Get a room!"

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS FLOYD/CAMERA PRESS. THIS PAGE: POSED BY MODELS; FLASHPOP/GETTY; GETTY

Zoe Williams

Rejoice, serfs, for the King of the North is touring his domain

Andy Burnham is going on a "listening tour", travelling the country on a bus to find out what real people are concerned about. I've heard commentators rationalise the idea in various ways: apparently it underscores the difference between him and his predecessor, who only ever relaxed when he was out of the country; what else is Burnham going to do in recess, with his cabinet already chosen – organise his Post-it notes?; he's been out of politics a long time, and many people will be only dimly aware of who he is; his speeches to date have had a very urban focus, and particularly with farming being this season's crisis sector, he needs to broaden his sphere of interest to take in rural areas.

Truly, the prime ministerial honeymoon period is like a one-year-old's birthday party – all you have to do is stand up and smile, for everyone to clap.

None of the rationalisations are in any way true: an in-person focus group, where you journey to discover a range of concerns you could figure out for yourself with one report from the Institute for Public Policy Research and half a brain, is exactly the kind of thing Starmer would have done, if he'd thought of it. There's quite a bit to be getting on with, between now and September, since autumn's looming crises – food shortages, energy price hikes due to the war in Iran – are plain, and there's no better time to plan than when you don't have the leader of the opposition yanking your chain.

Burnham actually has tremendous household-level recognition, thanks to a combination of hinterland and eyelashes, as evidenced by the fact that even when contesting Makerfield he got mobbed every time he got out of a car. Now, the conditions devastating farmers, being the direct result of climate crisis, would be better addressed by a long-range strategy on the transition to renewables, not a chinwag.

I'll meet the roadshow halfway, though, and accept that the thinking behind it is buried deeper in the squishy collective subconscious than the "marketing strategy for mid-sized building society" strata. This is the living definition of "peripatetic", an adjective usually attached to kings.

Medieval kings travelled around the country in order to collect their taxes by literally eating them from one noble estate to the next. Tax hikes could be exacted by simply adding to your entourage and eating more. King John's train stretched two miles, bulked up by the mercenaries required to protect the pampered non-warrior class from rebel barons who were sick of having their food eaten. In a pesky feedback loop, the larger your entourage, the more you all ate, the more annoyed the aristocracy became, the more mercenaries you needed and the larger your entourage.

Burnham could be forgiven for thinking he's more than a match for this death spiral, having the lessons of history right there, but can we forgive him for the emotional leap that put him on his tour bus? His first question seems to have been not "What would the leader of a mature democracy in an embattled period do?" but "What would be the first move of the King of the North?"

His kingly role models must all come from the dawn of monarchy, since by the time you get to Henry VIII, he's only really travelling to escape sewage overflow from his last great palace. But then "King of the North" has always had a very medieval overtone. A sign of the early modern period's growing governmental sophistication was its ability to distinguish one bit of the north from another.

It is endearing, if also nerve-racking and painful, to consider the faith underpinning this self-fashioning – that leadership is an innate quality more important than sequential thought and planning, and that if the stars light upon a leader who can connect with his people, the nation will come together, good decisions will be made and the rest is detail. You can but hope that's the limit of the wishful thinking, and he's not also banking on some dragons.

I'm officially in favour of university. However ...

In one of the most poignant vox pops I ever did, I wasn't even looking for Neets, AKA young people who aren't in education, employment or training. I was just looking for people on the streets near Liverpool with enough time to speak to me. I ran into a young man who had dropped out of university, and he explained why: he'd been doing a business studies degree, and had realised during his second term that a degree didn't make sound business sense. Everything he was learning, he could have found in a book, and the nine grand of annual fees was only a fraction of the total debt he was incurring. He went on to tell me quite a lot about upfront cost and hidden cost, and ratios and leverage, but the bottom line was that it didn't represent value for money.

So he left, but that gave him three problems: first, he still had a load of debt, just nothing to show for it; second, he had nothing to do; third, a lot of the value of a degree cannot be counted – you only begin to comprehend it by its absence.

As A-level results loom this week, I constantly have my beak in teenagers' business. Friends of my kids, work-experience students I've known and loved: I can't stop myself asking them all the standard questions – what university they want to go to, what their offer is, what their predictions are. The emotional rhythms are irresistible: you strive for a thing; you get close to the thing, conditionally; you strive harder and you hopefully hit the jackpot. Even if I were to engage my critical brain, and think: "How much additional earning potential will an English and history degree from Exeter deliver?", I don't believe in that as a metric. I'm not willing to surrender to a normal in which the only point of reading and thinking is converting them into a definable employment status. At the same time, I'm not going to be the one paying for that idealism – they are. So I carry on contributing to the social fantasy that student debt is an inevitability and a solid investment, just to avoid dealing with the world as it is.

That guilt and vague foreboding must be even worse for teachers. No wonder they're so into apprenticeships.

▼ *Investing in her future?*

‘I’m giving people a happy space’

When he saw a messy garden being criticised on social media, Stephen Jalland grabbed his trimmer and decided to help. An overgrown yard, he soon discovered, often hides an overwhelmed owner

Emily Retter

▶ *‘I always say: it’s not perfect, but it’s better’ … Stephen Jalland tackles Anita Thursby’s garden (left)*

Anita Thursby had been dreading the gas engineer coming to service her boiler. They would have needed to enter her kitchen, where the window looked into the jungle of swirling, 2-metre-high brambles that made up her back garden, and her shame had spiralled. “I would have been horrified,” she says. For the same reason, the 54-year-old had stopped inviting friends over to her house and had been living in fear of a complaint from her housing association.

Maintaining the garden had slipped from her grasp, becoming a source of constant worry, yet pride had stopped her asking for help – and tight finances from paying for it. Family barbecues had become a distant memory, even though she longed to have her 83-year-old mother round to sit in the sun; weeks ago, she bought a grill in Tesco with little hope of ever using it.

Stephen Jalland nods as she explains all this. Sweat, from the exertion of hacking through the weeds clawing at Thursby’s bungalow, is running down his face. His arms are crisscrossed with old scratches and the ruby-red blood of new ones, smearing into sticky blackberry-juice stains.

Thursby describes Jalland as “family”, but in truth they met just days ago. That was when he arrived to start clearing her garden for nothing – an act of generosity he has performed for about a dozen people with similarly overgrown outside spaces since launching a “free mows” service on Facebook in June.

“I really don’t think you understand how much difference you make to people,” Thursby tells him, bringing coffee amid moldering vegetation and a thick fug of petrol fumes from his trimmer. “Demons have been going in my head over this,” she adds, gazing at the partly cleared space. “Instantly, the weight is gone off my shoulders.”

Jalland nods again. “That’s what we’re aiming for,” he says, gruffly. And it is that matter-of-factness for which she is most grateful. Jalland, 57, did not blink when he arrived. “There was no judgment at all,” she says. “He said: ‘Come on, let’s have a look.’”

But it *is* judgment that has led Jalland to Thursby’s garden, not far from his own home in the Cambridgeshire town of March. More specifically, the realisation that there is too much of it in the world. “I was pissed off with people’s attitudes,” he says. It all started in June when, finding himself with time on his hands as his new handyman business struggled to pick up work, he scrolled through a Facebook group and noticed a post about an overgrown lawn. “Here was an anonymous person having a go about somebody’s garden, how people should take pride in where they live … You know, really having a go, not knowing their situation.”

His reaction was instinctive: “Give me the address and I’m going to go down there and cut the grass.” Someone messaged him the address privately, he says, and he immediately “got off my ass”. When he arrived and offered his help, the man thanked him, then began to explain why his garden was as it was. “He was a single bloke living with his son and had various health problems. When his mower broke, he couldn’t afford to replace it.”

Jalland spent two hours cutting the overgrowth and removing rubbish. Meanwhile, the man made him a curry. Jalland returned the following week to do his back garden, too. “We were able to sit down and have a chat. I got to know the bloke. Some people are on their own; they need someone to talk to. It’s all part of it.”

When he posted pictures of the garden’s transformation on Facebook, an avalanche hit: “It got 40,000 likes and about 5,000 comments.” He also received 1,000 direct messages asking for help, not generally from garden owners, but from their concerned neighbours, friends and family. “I thought: ‘What the hell have I done?’” Jalland recalls. “People need help. Reading them, the amount that it brought me to tears was unreal.” So he decided to offer one free garden clearance a week. He has been doing closer to three.

For every clearance, just as Jalland suspected, there has been a story of struggle lurking not so deeply in the weeds. It’s rarely laziness or nonchalance. Behind Thursby’s jungle is her father’s ill health, her adult daughter’s

‘People need help. The way their messages brought me to tears was unreal’

▶ *Thursby (right) with Beverley Williams, who asked Jalland to help her friend*

▲ *Jalland uncovers an old suitcase*

'I don't think he understands how much difference he makes to people'

▼ *Bramble scratches come with the territory, Jalland says*

PHOTOGRAPHS: FABIO DE PAOLA/THE GUARDIAN

ill health and, finally, her own: a stage-four cervical cancer diagnosis in 2024, followed by gruelling treatment.

A few days before this, Jalland cleared for a "bloke housebound on the sofa", whose doors were so blocked by overgrowth that they had become a "firetrap". Brambles reached his bungalow's gutters. Jalland spent seven hours clearing. Then there was a mum with cancer who wanted a space for her young daughter to play. Often, mental health concerns accompany or supersede physical ailments. "I did a woman the other day and you could see she's suffering – the anxiety, the stress," Jalland says.

Next, there was the married couple, one of whom had become her partner's carer and then broken her wrist. With garden maintenance becoming unmanageable, she became terrified of eviction. "She was in tears about it," he says. And Jalland? "God, yeah."

He admits he struggles to prioritise the jobs he takes on; he tends to go by instinct and geography, offering a visit when he is nearby doing paid work. "I can't decide whether multiple sclerosis is worse than mental health, or mental health worse than being in a wheelchair … I'm going to look at it as the bigger picture. Yes, somebody's struggling. Someone needs help."

In Thursby's garden, he begins to cry again. He is deeply moved by her thanks. She adored her garden after moving here with her daughter in 2008. "I have been feeling very down, I think because of the state of it, but also realising what my limitations are," she says. "The worse it got, the more I realised I was never physically going to be able to get on top of it." She worried about what people would say. "Would there be a complaint? I didn't want anybody to come round." In the end, her friend Beverley Williams, 67, messaged Jalland. "I would never have asked," Thursby says.

Jalland's understanding stems from his own experience. The father of three worked all his adult life as an engineer, but left his job about a year ago to work for himself. His wife works in care and he knows he may need to get a "proper job" again at some point, to help make ends meet. He has had depression in the past and still takes medication. "I've been at the bottom of that barrel looking up quite a few times," he says. It happened initially after a motorcycle accident when his wife was expecting their first child. They had moved into their first home and his physical injuries, plus the stress of being unable to work or maintain the house, sent him to a dark place.

Then came an offer of assistance. "It was an occupational therapist," he recalls. "She asked: 'What could we do to help?' I said the garden was a mess; they cleared and gravelled it, so it was maintenance-free. I felt on top of the world, a feeling of: thank God that's done – that's one thing that won't play on my mind.

"Me cutting the grass does not fix somebody's mental health problems," he continues. "But it can aid in making them feel a little bit better about themselves. It just takes away that little bit of stress." He knows what a patch of usable garden can give. "I've said to people: 'I'm going to make you a space where you can come out of the house and sit and have a cup of coffee and enjoy the sunshine.' It's a safe space, a happy space, a clear space." He is not a gardener, he admits, but he's making a difference all the same. "I always say: 'It's not perfect, but it's better.'"

As he launches himself at the final section of Thursby's garden, Jalland explains that he didn't know how to cut back overgrowth when he began offering free garden clearances; he says it's "trial and error". His main tools are two trimmers (one was donated), a rake, a grass-covered broom and a small mower, about 30 years old, which he calls "the little mower that can". You quickly see why.

His formula is to use a bladed trimmer to slash the tangles of brambles at their trunk-like bases, then yank the woody knots towards him with a rake, to loosen them. He then daubs at the tangles with his trimmer, like an artist with a brush, watching the fragments of stem slip to the floor before the mower chomps it all to sawdust. "You've just got to go at it," he says.

Along with carrier bags and other assorted rubbish, objects start to reveal themselves as the undergrowth thins. At Thursby's, there is a suitcase and an old Little Tikes easel. "Oh my God, that was *here*!" she says. She recalls her daughter using it as a child. "She had chalks, she would scribble all over it – she loved crafts."

Jalland knows that many people will not be able to maintain his work, but he doesn't mind. "I'd love them to keep on top of it, but they can't always. I get that. The way I think about it is: I'll be doing this all again next year if that's the case."

He is trying to gather momentum by posting on social media, hoping he can generate funding. At the time of writing, he has only 140 YouTube subscribers. "The videos are shit," he says. Meanwhile, he is crowdfunding for new tools, with £695 raised so far.

Even when his paid work picks up, he wants to keep his free garden clearances going on Saturdays. "I think I have found a purpose for my life, in a way," he says. "There's a need and I can fill it – and it's filling big gaps in my heart, isn't it?" Has he seen a change in his own mood? "I don't know, because I'm knackered," he says. "But when I go home and take my boots off, I do feel I have done something good."

The mental health charity Mind is available on 0300 123 3393

If you can’t stand the heat …

The author of Kitchen Confidential has inspired a new film, Tony, about his days as a dishwasher. Do today’s chefs still admire Anthony Bourdain’s self-sabotaging rock’n’roll spirit – or have they outgrown it?

Zoe Williams

The trope of the Angry Young Man was not born in a kitchen, but Anthony Bourdain’s particular myth-making created what might be the prototype for *fin de* (20th) *siècle* masculinity. As the director of Tony, the new biopic of Bourdain focusing on his first job, has said, the film is about “a magical world where nothing can go wrong and a young man who’s angry about it”.

Bourdain arrived in that job, as a dishwasher in a restaurant in Provincetown, Massachusetts, aged 19. He was hellbent on a life of formless, self-sabotaging rebellion, and found his tribe. But when he published his book Kitchen Confidential in 2000, a quarter of a century later, he set the ethos of that kitchen tribe in stone, and attracted an ever-replenishing pool of chefs who, if they weren’t already just like him, were prepared to die trying.

However, that anger, like everything about Bourdain, was performative, playful. He compared himself once to the chef Eric Ripert, saying they both had a “live and let live energy”, but Ripert “believes in karma … I believe in vendetta”. That fabled anger never sounded quite real.

Kitchen Confidential starts with Bourdain travelling through France as a child with his brother and his moneyed American parents of European inclinations and heritage. He is a little prick to his family, for no reason, and he’s also a git to the French kids, before returning to the US to be a jerk to flatmates and girlfriends in his private liberal arts university (Vassar) before dropping out. He’s still in his teens in 1975, when he takes that lowly job in Provincetown. There, he’s a minnow among absolute sharks of delinquency – a chef might turn out an impromptu service for a 100-strong post-wedding party, then bang the bride against the bins afterwards. The staff scored drugs you’ve never heard of, and drugs you’d never have needed if you hadn’t taken all those other drugs.

In that kitchen, Bourdain finds his spiritual home, “a subculture whose centuries-old militaristic hierarchy and ethos of ‘rum, buggery and the lash’ make for a mix of unwavering order and nerve-shattering chaos”, he wrote in Kitchen Confidential. That book, remembers the journalist, cookery writer and cook Diana Henry, 63, described “a world we didn’t have an in on, and suddenly we did”. (Henry did, in my view, the best late-era interview with Bourdain, two years before his death.)

Bourdain described his cheffly mission: “Your body is not a temple, it’s an amusement park. Enjoy the ride.” In his writing, as in his cooking, he prioritised pace and crunch over elegance and fuss. Relationships in this brigade system were tightly bonded and savagely caustic. “As an art form, cook talk is, like haiku or kabuki, defined by established rules,” he wrote. “All comments must, out of historical necessity, concern involuntary rectal penetration, penis size, physical flaws or annoying mannerisms or defects.” Between the drugs, the shagging, the late nights, the contradictory, hurtling imperatives of discipline and self-indulgence, the contempt for self-care and the penis jokes, this was a definitionally masculine ideal, and not even for so childish a reason as that you’d need a dick in order to dip it in someone’s Vichyssoise. There’s just no female model for being beautiful, high and still smashing it at work: the women in this space (just off the top of my head, Nancy Spungen, Amy Winehouse) end up dead.

In many ways, Bourdain was just saying what he saw: this was the reality of kitchens across decades and continents. Tom Kerridge, 53, describes being drawn in by exactly the same atmosphere: “Every chef will tell you the same thing – they don’t come into kitchens because they love food. Chefs love the energy of being chefs. It becomes your way of life, as opposed to what you do – it’s what you are.” Kitchens might have their hierarchies imported from the French army, their insubordination penalties only a fraction less violent, yet at the same time, Kerridge continues, “they’re building sites, they’re construction zones, they’re full of people using sharp things and burning themselves, who are all really tired”.

Andrew Clarke, 48-year-old co-owner and exec chef at Acme Fire Cult in east London, and the founder of Glandstonbury (yes, it’s an offal festival), said of his first colleagues – nowhere fancy, a pizza place in Bluewater, in the late 90s: “They were these pirates. None of them were proper chefs. They needed a job without a CV, without any qualifications – some of them had been in prison, and the kitchen was very accepting of that.” The word “pirate” is used constantly, by everyone, and the ex-con thing is real: in 2009 the Clink charity was established, opening restaurants in High Down, Brixton and a couple of other prisons, teaching prisoners skills for when they got out. And there’s a reason they were trained up for professional kitchens, not ice-cream parlours.

Clarke remembers arriving “in a kitchen that was very French, very disciplined, very trained. Bourdain’s book was just out, and I just started reading little passages, and I thought, ‘That’s me. That’s the person I am, that’s where I’ve been, that’s what I’ve done.’”

Sally Abé – 38, former head chef at the Pem in the Conrad, St James’s, London, and, lately, her own bistro, Teal – had an all-female senior team at the Pem, but did not enter the business in 2007 wanting to throw over its hyper-masculine conventions. “To be honest, I’m a very stubborn, determined person,” she says. “When I was 21, I thought, ‘I can be one of the boys,’ and I got swept up in it. It was really fun.”

Yet at the same time, Bourdain’s

▲ *Anthony Bourdain in Sydney, 2005*

‘Some of the chefs had been in prison and the kitchen was very accepting of that’

◀ *Sally Abé: ‘I thought I could be one of the boys’*

◀ *René Redzepi of Noma, who resigned after being accused of abusing his staff*

▶ *Tom Kerridge: ‘Chefs love the energy of being chefs’*

◀ *Chefs Andrew Clarke (left) and Daniel Watkins, at Acme Fire Cult in east London*

writing was so vivid, his character so magnetic, his joie de vivre so complicatedly credible and so contagious, that he built the world in the act of describing it.

As much as it pains me to pour cold water over it, Bourdain’s myth – the bit that was neither rooted in reality, nor prefigurable by force of will – was that the quintessential chef’s life could just proceed without consequence. “Bourdain romanticised that sort of life,” Henry says, “taking coke, drinking too much.” He ended up in rehab in the early 90s, but remained a heavy smoker and drinker. In kitchens the world over, says Clarke: “All roads led to the bar: a good service, you go to the bar, a bad service, you go to the bar. I saw chefs being drunk in service, and quite often that was me. I’d have a skinful at lunch and then do a dinner.” Kerridge has talked in the past about his jaw-dropping alcohol consumption, before he went teetotal in 2013.

In 2015, Clarke suffered a terrible depressive episode. When he posted about it on Instagram, a huge number of people in the industry shared their own experiences with him. He has since set up a mental health charity for people working in the hospitality industry called Pilot Light. “While we wanted to raise awareness of mental health in the business, it inevitably led to people talking about bullying, sexism and racism in the industry. I’m a chef – I wanted to keep it very clean and simple. For me it was about mental health. But it was Pandora’s box.”

It’s worth making a distinction between the ludic, juvenile macho vibe Bourdain immortalised and a more modern toxic masculinity, designed to undermine, control and exclude women (having come of age in the 90s, I could spend forever insisting on that distinction). However, Bourdain himself, a subtle and self-critical person, could see how the first provided cover for the second. As he told an audience at his alma mater, the Culinary Institute of America, in 2017: “If there’s a harasser in the kitchen who’s a jerk, chances are he’s got a copy of my book on his station. And I’m going to have to live with that.”

There were also a lot of real bullies operating under the cover of play-bullying, and it’s interesting, looking back, how widely this was accepted in the industry. It was an open secret when Noma – the experimental Danish restaurant – was huge in the 2000s that its founder, René Redzepi, terrorised his staff. When the New York Times published evidence in March that Redzepi had “punched employees in the face, jabbed them with kitchen implements and slammed them against walls” leading to “lasting trauma from layers of psychological abuse, including intimidation, body shaming and public ridicule”, the collective sound of people feigning horror at a thing that we’d all known for 20 years was really something.

That’s not just kitchens, of course. “Not only does it look like an awful way to treat people, it’s become unacceptable,” Henry says. “You can’t bully anybody anywhere.” She recalls her experience working as a TV producer on food programmes. “Even the way I behaved in television, making researchers stay late because they hadn’t done enough, I wouldn’t get away with that now. We don’t like it any more.”

Abé has no problem differentiating between mischief, intensity, ego and harassment. “Kitchens are always going to be high-pressure places – once you’re in the service, you’re in the service. If the food’s not ready, you’re an idiot. But I’ve taken all those environments I worked in and turned them on their head. My kitchen’s nothing like that now.”

Clarke is done with the macho bullying (“It’s deeply uncool,” he says), and when he started Acme in 2022, he did a thing that would doubtless have had Bourdain, back in the day, exploding in 2,000 colourful words. “We have very physical, long days; none of us look after ourselves like athletes and perhaps we should. We were doing yoga classes in the space, checking in, talking to each other. Doing everything a little more holistically.” It’s not as anti-Bourdain as it sounds, Clarke says: “He got into jiu-jitsu in his 50s. He was fully at the point of: ‘I’m going to look after myself.’”

Bourdain never understood his own propensity for self-sabotage, as well as other-people-sabotage. It’s laced through his writing: there he always is, making trouble for no good reason. And he said as much to Henry when she interviewed him. “What is it that gave him the pain that he carried around with him?” she asks. “His childhood sounded perfectly OK. He was just always a bit of a wreck until he got to be a chef. It’s strict – you can’t not deliver. You’ve got to be in, you’ve got to see your crew, you’ve got to do your service. There are completely set rules and you can’t disobey them.” Kitchens were a haven for people who needed rules as much as they hated them, and could only reconcile those warring urges in a cacophony of appetites.

Perhaps inevitably, through some combination of a little foresight and a changing world, the pirate spirit that defined kitchens for so long is being replaced by a new intellectualism. “Chefs nowadays are like bloody poets,” Henry says. “Stevie Parle, Merlin Labron-Johnson – all these people have got degrees. Once they would have been doing a master’s and a PhD; instead they’re focusing on growth and animals and flavour combinations and technical stuff.”

It’s not a sanitised world. It surely still has plenty of what Bourdain wrote were the fundamentals of “good food and good eating … blood and organs and cruelty and decay”. An intellectual kitchen just doesn’t invite chaos, or torment, or madcappery, but you wonder what will become of all the people who were mainly in it for those things.

Tony, the biopic of Anthony Bourdain, is in cinemas from Friday

PHOTOGRAPHS: FAIRFAX MEDIA/GETTY, SOPHIA SPRING/THE OBSERVER, MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN, SOPHIA EVANS/THE OBSERVER

▲ *'It's a living, breathing thing that speaks to the moment' … a moment from this year's show, A Call to Gather*

Yeehaw! Bring on the tap-dancing cowgirls!

With its marching bands, billowing flags and precision drills, the Edinburgh Military Tattoo has never exactly been cool. But now an experimental theatre-maker has been let loose on it …

'Every military leader I spoke to thinks we'll be at war five years from now'

Mark Fisher

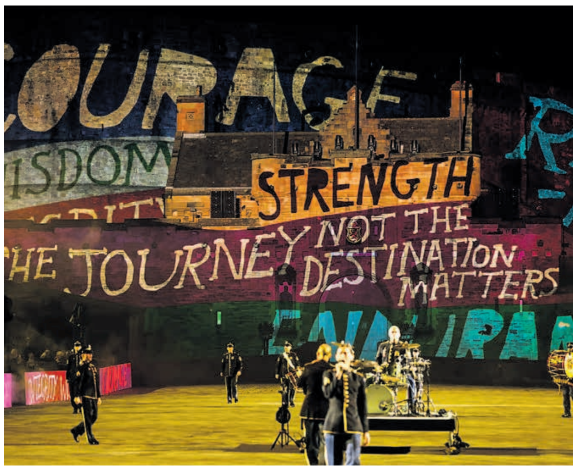
Dusk has settled on Edinburgh Castle and now a laser beam is scribbling a route across its ramparts and high into the sky. The voice of actor Richard Rankin is talking solemnly about lonely soldiers answering a call, while a ferocious light rises in the gatehouse. Out of it emerge scores of drummers and pipers, their sound both melodic and awe-inspiring. They crisscross the esplanade to the stirring lament of The Skye Boat Song.

This is the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, an event often overlooked amid the festival cacophony – and yet its popularity eclipses any other event in the city. Last year, it played to 230,000 and raised £1.5m for charity. Like an outsize variety show, it is a formidable spectacle: fireworks, projections, flags dragged over the audience and a soundtrack that ranges from Carmen to Star Wars.

I speak to Susan from Aberdeen who is here with her daughter for the third year in a row. They love the highland dancing. "The atmosphere is amazing," she says, delighted to be back. From New Zealand, Francesca tells me she is staying with family in Glasgow and is here for the night. "It's a bucket-list item," she says. "I was going to go when it toured to Auckland in February but I was told I had to see the original one first."

Staff Sgt Ross Yorkstone, drum major with the New Zealand army band, is equally pleased to be here. Performing for the sixth year, he can think of no equivalent. "The closest would be the Basel Tattoo but it's nowhere near as big," he says. "We always come here with our top A-game."

▼ *Words of wisdom … backdrop to the Tattoo*



On a hot summer afternoon, I sit down with Alan Lane, the creative director, in West Princes Street Gardens to talk about the event's phenomenal appeal. Our meeting place is deliberate: next to us is a statue of a kilted soldier with a rifle across his knees. He is the figure voiced by Rankin in A Call to Gather, the name of this year's Tattoo show, and is looking poignantly towards the Scottish National War Memorial high above us in the castle grounds. Known as The Call 1914, the memorial is a tribute to the American expats who came to fight in the first world war. It is Lane's inspiration. "It's a celebration of those who will lend a hand," he says. "If you're my friend, I'm going to come when you call."

But which Alan Lane am I talking to? There seem to be two. One is the kind of man you would expect to be commanding a military display: a reservist who trained at Sandhurst as an officer in the Royal Engineers and who, as a wide-eyed 18-year-old, set his heart on directing the Tattoo. He is 1.9 metres tall (6ft 3in) and holds himself with a soldier's bearing.

The other Alan Lane is more surprising. A lifelong Labour party member, he is the founding artistic director of Slung Low, the Leeds-based theatre company with a speciality in big community events. He was behind Flood, a four-part epic with a cast of 58 for Hull, UK City of Culture, and Camelot: The Shining City, a dystopian fantasy in which the audience was evacuated from the Sheffield Crucible as part of the show.

This Lane set up a community college on a doubledecker bus, took charge of a working men's club and, for a year during the pandemic, coordinated a free food delivery service in Holbeck and Beeston in Leeds. He is a vegetarian who today has shown up in pink shorts. "Having run a food bank and working men's club, there aren't many theatre directors who are more obnoxiously leftwing than I was," he laughs, keeping an eye

▶ *'I was obnoxiously leftwing' … Alan Lane, the Sandhurst-trained officer who evacuated the Sheffield Crucible for a show*

on Bolt, his spaniel, who has come along for the walk.

You can understand why Lane is not keen on singular thinking. If others see a contradiction in his background, he does not. "The beach commanders on D-day were part of the Labour cabinet five years later," he says. "I don't get how it isn't leftwing to believe we need a military and that there is some honour in that."

Still, the organisation took some adjusting to. After his appointment in April 2024, he was kitted out with tweed, tartan and ties. He is not joking when he says that the Tattoo has a crisis meeting when attendance for the 8,800-capacity show drops below 96% – a figure that any arts company could only dream of. "But actually what I've found is, fundamentally, we're not that different," he says. And anyway, for Lane differences are there to be bridged. "Where that gets us to in this year's Tattoo is a sharing of culture in order to understand each other," he says. "This year, we've got the Americans and the Qataris in a show – that's not by accident."

The juxtaposition is plain to see. The Qatar Police Academy Band and Drill Team, with its sky-blue tunics, strident song and Islamic projections, comes on straight after a section called Bright Brave World in which US culture is represented by the Jackson 5, country music and tap-dancing cowgirls. Slogans of the nation's founding principles are splashed across the castle walls: "All men are created equal", "A new nation conceived in liberty", "The pursuit of happiness".

Launched in 1950, the Tattoo established elements that remain to this day. There will always be marching bands and traditional songs, and they could not do without the lone piper, the solitary player on the ramparts who casts a spine-tingling hush across the audience. But every year, two-thirds of the event is created anew by the organisation's own dancers and musicians – 133 of them, one of the largest amateur companies in the country. "In the same way you wouldn't go: 'Oh no, I've seen Scottish Ballet', you'd say: 'What are they doing this year?'" says Lane. "They're turning those skills and talents to a different story."

If he is trying to capture the moment, this is nothing new. In 1962, the audience crowded on to the esplanade to dance to Chubby Checker's Let's Twist Again, a hit only a few months earlier. In 2022, the US army Field Band brought hip-hop to the castle, with rappers Lamar Riddick and Nicholas Feemster taking to the mics for a cover of Clean Bandit's Rather Be. "It's a living, breathing thing that speaks to the moment," says Lane. "The show has to have a specific creative intent at every moment. It's not enough to say: 'The New Zealand army band are coming – they'll do their thing.' There has to be something worth saying."

What, then, is worth saying in 2026? "People paying attention to each other's cultures," says Lane without hesitation. "This job involves me sitting with lots of military leaders telling me their plans for the next three or four years. All of them involve war. Not *preparing* for war – actual war. Looking five years out, every one of them says: 'At that point, we are at war.' This is a good time to be doing this show, where can we find common ground because they keep telling me war is coming."

But what of those who see the Tattoo as a celebration of military might? Sensitivities feel especially acute this year, when the Tattoo, like the Edinburgh international festival, is marking the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence while the US is firing missiles at Iran. Is this really the best moment to bring on the US army Field Band performing the "best of Americana"?

"The Tattoo doesn't celebrate the military," says Lane, unruffled by the suggestion. "I sit in meetings with people who wish it would do that, but it's not our job. The Tattoo is unapologetically Scottish in its celebration of heritage. We genuinely love it. We're zealots. But it doesn't speak to militarism in those ways at all."

He continues: "The thing I'm sure of is: in times of difficulty, talk more, not less. The challenges for an American band to come here are real, and it would be very easy for them to decide they didn't want to waste any political capital by coming. And it would be very easy for us not to invite them. I think we would be lesser for it because we would forget the great philosophical and poetic ideas of America. It's brilliant to be reminded of them and to think: 'Ah, this too shall pass.'"

A Call to Gather, the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, is at Edinburgh Castle until 29 August. Details: edintattoo.co.uk

▶ *Electric dreams … the New Zealand army band*

PHOTOGRAPHS: MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN; DOM MOORE

HOW WE MADE

Hunt for the Wilderpeople

Interviewed just before his death, Sam Neill recalls his hostile hunting dog, Taika Waititi's comedy genius – and the wild boar attack that left children traumatised

▶ *'It felt like both of us were 12' … Julian Dennison, left, and Sam Neill*

PHOTOGRAPH: PIKI FILMS/ALLSTAR

Sam Neill, played Hector Faulkner

Taika Waititi's film Boy is one of my favourites, so when I got the Wilderpeople script I was already well disposed to it. Hec is sort of a New Zealand archetype. When I was at university, during the holidays I'd work at cutting hay and shifting sheep and fertiliser. There was always a Hec driving the truck. They were men of very few words, but when they did say something it meant a lot. It was clear I was never going to have many lines in the film.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is based on Wild Pork and Watercress, a novel by Barry Crump, a legendary figure when I was growing up. A lot of his stuff is very amusing, but not this one – it took Taika to make it funny. Just about every comedian in New Zealand is in the film. I was probably the only non-comedian, but the film has a complexity beyond the humour. A lot of that comes, I think, from Rima Te Wiata. She plays Hec's wife Bella with such warmth, compassion and empathy that when she dies both Hec and Ricky are suffused with grief. That grief gives a powerful dimension to the remainder of the film.

The Ricky Baker birthday song seems to have become a sort of informal national anthem, but it's only in the film because the traditional Happy Birthday song wasn't then in the public domain. The scene was all set up with Rima about to play the conventional version on her little keyboard when the producer came running in and said: "We can't use that, we don't have copyright!" Rima, Taika and I had to write something new in 10 minutes, but it was mostly Rima. Sometimes, working under pressure produces the best things.

I didn't have the best relationship with the canine actor that played Hec's hunting dog, Zag. I'm a dog guy, but he wasn't the pal you would expect a dog to be – he had other things on his mind. The wild boar that wounds Zag was realised on screen in a mixture of ways, but on location we were reacting to a couple of guys operating a kind of puppet pig. The finished scene is pretty full-on. A lot of people have to comfort their children after it.

People often stop me and say it's their favourite film. They remember it with affection, and when something is taken to heart, that's a wonderful thing to have in your CV. The only thing that irritated me after its release was some people saying Julian stole the film from me. I don't think there was any theft involved – the film was always his in the first place.

Sam Neill gave this interview in June, a month before his death on 13 July

Julian Dennison, played Ricky Baker

I'd worked with Taika before on an anti-drugs advert and didn't have to audition. Ricky is this broken kid stuck in a system of foster care that's failing him. I come from a community where that happens a lot with young people – I had cousins who acted like Ricky Baker, I had friends who dressed like him.

I knew Sam Neill was big and lots of people liked him, but I didn't really know who he was. Knowing there were going to be all these scenes of just him and me in the bush, I thought: "Man, I hope he's not lame …" He turned out to be very young at heart, like an older cousin. I had the best time and loved hanging out with Sam – sometimes it felt like both of us were 12 years old.

I grew up in a religious home and went to Sunday school, and I wasn't a big swearer like Ricky. When it came to lines like: "Shit just got real!" I was like: "Am I allowed to say this?"

Taika was open to ideas, which often arrived while we were all practising our lines in a hot tub. In the scene where Ricky and Hec are trying to come up with an escape plan with Rhys Darby's character, Psycho Sam, there was a line about an underground bunker. I said: "Wouldn't it be funny if Sam opened the door and realised he hadn't dug the tunnel yet?" That ended up in the movie.

The big car chase at the end was shot on the ancestral land of the Ngāti Rangi tribe, who were really welcoming and helpful, as were the army, who use some of their territory as a training ground. We had to travel in a truck with army people when we went from the filming base to the location. I guess they'd lost some of their mines or something – they'd be like: "If you see metal things sticking out of the ground, just let us know." If anything was spotted, someone would come over with bright pink spray paint and draw a circle around it, like some people do to draw attention to dog poo.

Interviews by Chris Broughton. The 10th anniversary release of Hunt for the Wilderpeople in 4k is in cinemas and on digital platforms now, with UHD and Blu-ray editions on 17 August

REVIEW BY PHIL HARRISON

Mourinho

◀ *High-wire act … José Mourinho*

The 'Special One' bridles at pretty much everything he's asked

★★★☆☆

Netflix

Among his previous credits, the director of this mini-series, Joe Pearlman, can count the revelatory and hilarious 2018 film Bros: After the Screaming Stops. That documentary worked brilliantly because its subjects seemed so sweetly but devastatingly lacking in discretion or self-awareness that everything they said landed like a line from a Christopher Guest parody.

Football manager José Mourinho is a very different kettle of cold fish. Like the Goss twins, he takes himself very seriously indeed, but that's pretty much where the similarities end. He's something of a closed book. "You are pushing me to speak about myself," he says. "And I don't want to." Which is fair enough but it does beg the question: why, then, would you agree to be the subject of an in-depth three-part documentary series?

The answer, you suspect, has a lot to do with setting various records straight. Mourinho clearly feels he has been misunderstood and misrepresented. When he arrived in England, he self-applied the nickname the Special One. But he bridles at the origins of this. "The Special One," he claims, "is some special shit some guys in England thought up for me." Mischievously, Pearlman then cuts directly to a clip of Mourinho describing himself thus at his first press conference as Chelsea manager. Although, to be pedantic (which Mourinho has every intention of being), he does say "*a* special one".

Many would argue he has earned the right to do exactly that. For years, Mourinho was a fearsomely effective manager. In 2004, he won the Champions League from nowhere with FC Porto. His first spell at Chelsea was a tale of almost uninterrupted glory (although there might usefully have been a little more interrogation of both the sporting and moral implications of its bankrolling by the Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich). While he was manager of Real Madrid, he single-handedly reversed the polarities of Spanish club football and won a frequently heated personal battle with the then Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola.

The documentary doesn't shy away from his frequently appalling behaviour along the way, but nor does it ever quite get to the bottom of it. He seemingly relished battles with officials that were so acrimonious that his accusations against the referee Anders Frisk led to Uefa having to officially rule to clear him of any responsibility for Frisk's subsequent resignation due to his family receiving threats from members of the public. His dealings with the media became the stuff of legend - he was paranoid, haughty and scornful. And he built teams in that image: sour, often spiteful, as difficult to like as they undeniably were to beat.

Cultivating a siege mentality is an age-old tactic among team managers, but it's fascinating to see how this works from the inside. It becomes clear that being as insufferable as Mourinho constitutes its own kind of courage. Because imagine if he failed. There was always a long way to fall. For a time, players responded. At various points, you'll begin to tire of ex-pros telling you how many walls they'd have run through for the gaffer - John Terry said he'd have left the pitch "in a coffin" for him. Player after player claims that he created a family - but they were frequently barely functional ones.

For a while, this high-wire act is gripping. But the patterns embodied by Mourinho's managerial career soon become a little limiting for documentary purposes. He's a manager of diminishing returns. Why has he been unable to build anything more lasting? There's plenty in Mourinho's past that hints at vulnerability - his almost non-existent playing career clearly troubled him ("I still think I don't belong to the tribe"), and he seems to carry an inferiority complex in relation to his father, who was also a football coach - although a markedly less successful one. "I was so proud to be Mourinho's son," he says at one point. "He's the opposite of me in that everybody loves him."

These moments of confession, vulnerability, of dropped guard don't come often enough to make this film gripping to anyone beyond football aficionados. Mourinho admits he doesn't have much else in his life. We briefly meet his family about 15 minutes before the end. "I know that they enjoy life much more without me," he confesses. He is clearly quite odd, and possibly, even now, as he prepares to take over again at Real Madrid, slightly unfulfilled. You suspect he doesn't want the world to see too much of this.

Success is relative, in life, football and documentary-making. Sometimes, it's about the journey, not the arrival. You assume that making the Bros film was less exacting than this. It was probably a lot more fun too.

What's On
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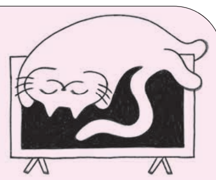
WHAT TO WATCH



Savage Mountain

9pm, Sky Documentaries

A white-knuckle documentary that uses footage captured by the Norwegian mountaineer Kristin Harila *(pictured, above)* and her climbing partner, Tenjen "Lama" Sherpa, as they broke a world record by completing 14 of the world's highest peaks in 92 days. But the videos Harila shared turned controversial, as many claimed her team had left a porter, Mohammad Hassan, to die en route. This film sets the record straight.

Hollie Richardson

The Great British Sewing Bee

8pm, BBC Two

Sophie Willan is primed with the puns as sports week kicks off and the contestants dive in to make a pair of men's swimming shorts. A team challenge brings some stunning creations, but an applique motif unravels when it raises the question: "Is that a badger or a panda?" **Hannah Verdier**

Cold Case Forensics: In the Blood

9pm, ITV1

The final episode of this series examines a case with which most of us will be sadly familiar: the murder of 10-year-old Londoner Damilola Taylor in 2000. Forensic scientist Angela Gallop explains how blood analysis helped the police solve a crime that shocked the nation. **Phil Harrison**

RuPaul's Drag Race UK: Meet the Queens

9pm, BBC Three

Before Mama Ru, Michelle Visage and their fabulous judges begin to cross-examine the queens, it's time for season eight's hopefuls to make their high-heeled entrance. As last season's queens so beautifully explained, the world needs drag more than ever right now, so the dozen divas must deliver. **HV**

Joe and David's Magical Sitcom Tour

9pm, U&Gold

Another journey into sitcom for Wilkinson and Earl. It's David's treat as Joe gives him a Fawlty Towers-themed day. Highlights include a funny conversation with Rosemary - the real-life Polly, who did work experience at the hotel upon which the show was based, and an audience with John Cleese, whose contributions focus exclusively on his illustrious past. **PH**

The Vampire Lestat: Interview With the Vampire

11.05pm, BBC Two

The camp vampire musical chaos takes a sombre moment as Lestat (an electrifying Sam Reid) finally sits down with Daniel (Eric Bogosian) to tell him about his first love - and the traumatic night he turned into a vampire. Meanwhile, Louis (Jacob Anderson) gets some belated, bloody revenge. **HR**

BBC One

6.0 Breakfast (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.0** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.30** European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026 (T) **1.15** News (T) **1.40** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.50** News (T) **2.0** Money for Nothing (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.30** The Repair Shop (T) (R) **4.30** The Answer Run (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Gabby Logan presents further coverage of the evening session on day two from Alexander Stadium, including the men's 100m final.

10.0 News (T)
10.30 Regional News (T) Weather
10.40 FILM **The Boys in the Boat** (George Clooney, 2023) (T) A group of rowing underdogs take on elite rivals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Fact-based drama, starring Joel Edgerton and Callum Turner.
12.35 Weather for the Week Ahead (T) **12.40** News (T)

BBC Two

6.15 Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **7.15** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: The Great British Sewing Bee (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **10.30** Antiques Road Trip (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R) **2.45** Country Showdown (T) (R) **3.30** Spy in the Ocean (T) (R) **4.30** Vintage Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Wild Reckoning (T) (R)

7.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) The men's hammer and women's 5000m.
8.0 **The Great British Sewing Bee** (T) The sewers tackle the wide world of sport.
9.0 **Bloody Mary: Lucy Worsley Investigates** (T) (R) Was Queen Mary a pioneer or a tyrant? Last in the series.

10.0 **Live at the Apollo** (T) (R) Emmanuel Sonubi hosts.
10.30 Newsnight (T) Weather
11.05 **The Vampire Lestat: Interview With the Vampire** (T) Daniel's probing triggers a troubled Lestat.
11.55 **The Vampire Lestat: Interview With the Vampire** (T) Louis worries his waiter.
12.45 **Sign Zone** Uncanny (T) (R)

ITV1

6.0 Good Morning Britain (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Inside the Langham: Britain's First Grand Hotel (T)

8.0 **Emmerdale** (T) Caleb is feeling frustrated, while Billy and Dawn plan their escape and Jacob is shocked.
8.30 **Coronation Street** (T) Tim and Sally reel from the news of Richie's murder charge.
9.0 **Cold Case Forensics: In the Blood** (T) Including the case of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor. Last in the series.

10.0 News (T) Weather
10.30 Local News (T) Weather
10.45 FILM **The Spy Who Loved Me** (Lewis Gilbert, 1977) (T) James Bond thriller, starring Roger Moore and Barbara Bach.
12.55 Shop on TV **3.0** The Summit (T) (R) **3.50** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.05** Long Lost Family: Born Without Trace (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.30 The King of Queens (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Saving Country Houses With Penelope Keith (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Dover 24/7: Britain's Busiest Port** (T) Border Force agents uncover suspicious packages and staff hold a remembrance service. Last in the series.
9.0 **Celebrity Hunted** (T) At a country hotel, two of the contestants are surrounded, while two others brave exposure at a hospital.

10.0 Gogglebox (T) (R)
11.05 Secret Lives of Gypsy Wives (T) (R)
12.05 Naked Attraction (T) (R) **1.0** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **1.50** Levison Wood: Walking With Orangutans (T) (R) **2.45** FILM The Kid Detective (2020) (T) **4.25** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.55** The Piano (T) (R) **5.50** Countdown (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 Milkshake! **9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM Danger Rocks the Cradle (Roxanne Boisvert, 2022) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Corfu: Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** The Yorkshire Vet: At Home With the Greens (T) (R) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Inside Longleat** (T) Cameras follow a bat conservation team, and Lady Bath and keeper Ian talk about Longleat's giraffes.
9.0 **The Romans With Rob Rinder and Ruth Goodman** (T) Rob and Ruth delve into 122 AD, when the Emperor Hadrian made a dramatic visit to Roman Britain.

10.30 **The Bomb on the Boat: The Murder of Lord Mountbatten** (T) (R) Documentary.
12.05 Serial Killer Wives (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **2.50** Castle (T) (R) **3.40** Friends (T) (R) **4.30** Yorkshire With Jane McDonald (T) (R) **5.25** Entertainment News (T) **5.35** Paw Patrol (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **The Architecture the Railways Built** (T) (R) The Ffestiniog railway. **7.40** **The Flying Gardener** (T) (R) From Dumfries and Galloway. **7.55** **To the Manor Born** (T) (R) Audrey leaves Grantleigh Manor.

8.30 **Keeping Up Appearances** (T) (R) Hyacinth tries to rescue Richard from social obscurity with a plan to turn him into an executive.
9.0 **Ardal O'Hanlon: Tomb Raider** (T) (R) The comic actor explores important archaeological finds in Ireland's history.

10.0 **Kamikaze: An Untold History** (T) (R) Veterans reflect on the impact of the second world war suicide missions.
11.30 The Sky at Night (T) (R)
12.0 Horizon: The Wildest Weather in the Universe (T) (R) **1.0** Beautiful Equations (T) (R) **2.0** The Flying Gardener (T) (R) **2.15** Ardal O'Hanlon: Tomb Raider (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** Spud **7.25** FILM Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001) **9.0** **RuPaul's Drag Race UK: Meet the Queens** **9.20** FILM Bridget Jones's Diary (2001) **10.55** FILM Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason (2004) **12.35** Matthew Perry and the Ketamine Queen **1.35** Stacey Dooley: Ready for War? **2.35** My Mate's a Bad Date **2.55** Stacey Dooley: Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **9.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein's Cornwall **10.50** Rick Stein's Cornwall **11.20** Yukon Gold **12.15** Top Gear **1.15** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Man and Beast With Martin Clunes **4.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **5.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **5.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? **8.20** Would I Lie to You? **9.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **10.0** QI XL **11.0** Taskmaster **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **2.0** QI XL **3.05** Richard Osman's House of Games **3.35** Parks and Recreation **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **6.30** Hollyoaks **6.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **12.0** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **6.30** Hollyoaks **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Vanderpump Rules **9.0** Below Deck Down Under **10.0** First Dates: Valentine's **11.05** Gogglebox **1.10** Vanderpump Rules **2.10** Below Deck Down Under **3.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **3.50** The Simpsons **4.15** The Goldbergs **5.05** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **5.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Man in the Saddle (1951) **12.45** FILM The Black Swan (1942) **2.30** FILM Fantastic Voyage (1966) **4.35** FILM The Kid Who Would Be King (2019) **7.05** FILM See How They Run (2022) **9.0** FILM **Missing** (2023) **11.15** FILM Jennifer's Body (2009) **1.20** FILM Plan B (2021)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **8.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **9.35** Eclipse Across Europe **10.40** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **11.55** Inside Japan's War **1.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **2.35** Eclipse Across Europe **3.50** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **5.05** Inside Japan's War **6.15** Digging Up Britain's Past **7.15** Eclipse Across Europe **8.25** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **9.40** Inside Japan's War **10.50** Eclipse Across Europe **12.0** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **1.15** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Mornings **6.30** Mornings **7.0** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **7.30** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **10.0** Will & Grace **10.30** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **11.30** The Simpsons **12.0** Ningaloo: Australia's Ocean Wonder **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** Animal Control **7.0** The Simpsons **8.0** Best Medicine **9.0** Never Mind the Buzzcocks **10.0** The 'Burbs **11.0** Animal Control **12.0** Grimm **1.0** The Force: Manchester **2.0** Road Wars **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** S.W.A.T

Sky Arts

6.0am A Swan Lake **7.55** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **8.55** Tales of the Unexpected **9.55** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Robert Shaw **12.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **3.0** The Eighties **4.0** Discovering: Rex Harrison **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2022 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** The World in a Painting: Ingres' Diamond **9.15** Art Traffickers: Treasures Stolen from the Tombs **10.15** Wonderland: Gothic **11.15** The Movies **12.15** Peter O'Toole: Along the Sky Road to Aqaba **2.15** The V&A Presents Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser **4.05** Sky Arts Book Club **5.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Fish Town **8.0** Billions **9.05** Billions **10.15** House of the Dragon **11.25** House of the Dragon **12.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.30** Billions **3.35** Billions **4.40** The Last of Us **5.45** The Last of Us **6.50** House of the Dragon **8.0** House of the Dragon **9.0** Gomorrah: The Origins **10.0** Gomorrah: The Origins **11.0** House of the Dragon **12.15** House of the Dragon **1.30** Billions **2.35** Billions **3.45** The Guest Wing **4.35** Sort Of **5.05** The Guest Wing

▲ *See How They Run, Film4*

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, the National Youth Orchestra play Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Montgeroult (R) **5.0** In Tune **6.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, Gustavo Dudamel conducts the LA Philharmonic in Beethoven's Symphony No 6 in F and Adès's Dante: Part 1 – Inferno. **8.15** BBC Proms 2026. At the Glasshouse in Gateshead, Feldman's Crippled Symmetry, played by Helena Gourd (flute/bass flute), Jude Carlton (vibraphone/glockenspiel) and Dinis Sousa (piano/celesta). **10.15** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, Tom Fetherstonhaugh conducts the Fantasia Orchestra, BBC Singers and percussionist Evelyn Glennie in works by John Coltrane, Ellington, Héloïse Werner, Vincent Ho, Feldman, Caroline Shaw, Dvořák, Vaughan Williams, Evelyn Glennie and Philip Sheppard, Radiohead and Meredith Monk. **11.45** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

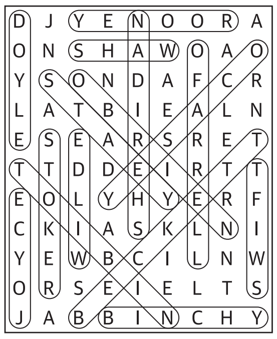
6.0am Today **9.0** Invisible Hands. David Dimbleby tells the story of the CIA. (3/6) **9.30** Inside Health (6/6) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** Screenshot (R) **11.45** Book of the Week Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir (2/5) **12.0** News **12.04** Call You and Yours **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Human Intelligence. The work of philosopher Ibn Khaldun. (12/15) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Clair. Fantasy crime drama, by Philip Palmer, with Hannah Daniel. **3.0** Lady on Trial With Lucy Worsley. Two sisters transported to Australia for receiving stolen ribbons. (9/10) **3.30** Heart and Soul (R) **4.0** Above and Below. The threat from climate change to the ancient creative past. **4.30** What's Up Docs? Why some people find it so difficult to relax. **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Paul Sinha's Perfect Pub Quiz (1/6) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** After EncroChat. Danny Shaw investigates whether the EncroChat operation reduced the supply of drugs. **8.40** In Touch **9.0** Crossing Continents. Efforts to protect Victoria Falls. (2/9) **9.30** Scam Secrets (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The Vicar of Wakefield (7/10) **11.0** Wild Inside (R) **11.30** A Good Read (R) **12.0** News **12.30** Book of the Week (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.0** News **5.04** Inside Science (R) **5.32** Weather **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Waiting Game (6/6) **6.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **7.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **7.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **8.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **8.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (2/10) **8.45** Small Island (12/15) **9.0** Meet David Sedaris (6/6) **9.30** Following the Martian Invasion (2/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** A Good Read (7/9) **10.30** The Things We Forgot to Remember (2/4) **11.0** The Waiting Game (6/6) **11.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **12.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **12.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **1.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **1.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (2/10) **1.45** Small Island (12/15) **2.0** Hoax! **2.30** Life in London (1/6) **3.0** Renaissance Man: The Last Judgement of Giorgio Vasari (2/3) **4.0** A Good Read (7/9) **4.30** The Things We Forgot to Remember (2/4) **5.0** The Waiting Game (6/6) **5.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **6.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **6.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **7.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **7.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (2/10) **7.45** Small Island (12/15) **8.0** Hoax! **8.30** Life in London (1/6) **9.0** Renaissance Man (2/3) **10.0** Meet David Sedaris (6/6) **10.30** And the Winner Is (6/6) **11.0** All the World's a Globe (6/8) **11.15** Foley and McColl: The Interview (6/6) **11.30** Chain Reaction (2/6) **12.0** A Good Read (7/9) **12.30** The Things We Forgot to Remember (2/4) **1.0** The Waiting Game (6/6) **1.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **2.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **2.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **3.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **3.30** Adrian Mole (2/10) **3.45** Small Island (12/15) **4.0** Hoax! **4.30** Life in London (1/6) **5.0** Renaissance Man (2/3)

Yesterday's solutions

Wordsearch



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Solution no 17,554

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Sudoku no 7,412

1	7	4	9	3	8	2	5	6
8	3	6	2	7	5	9	1	4
9	5	2	4	6	1	3	8	7
4	8	5	3	1	7	6	9	2
3	2	1	6	8	9	7	4	5
6	9	7	5	4	2	1	3	8
5	6	8	1	2	3	4	7	9
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Word wheel

INUNDATED

Suguru

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5	3	1	2	4	2

Looking for more?
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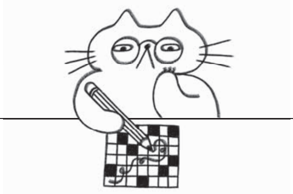
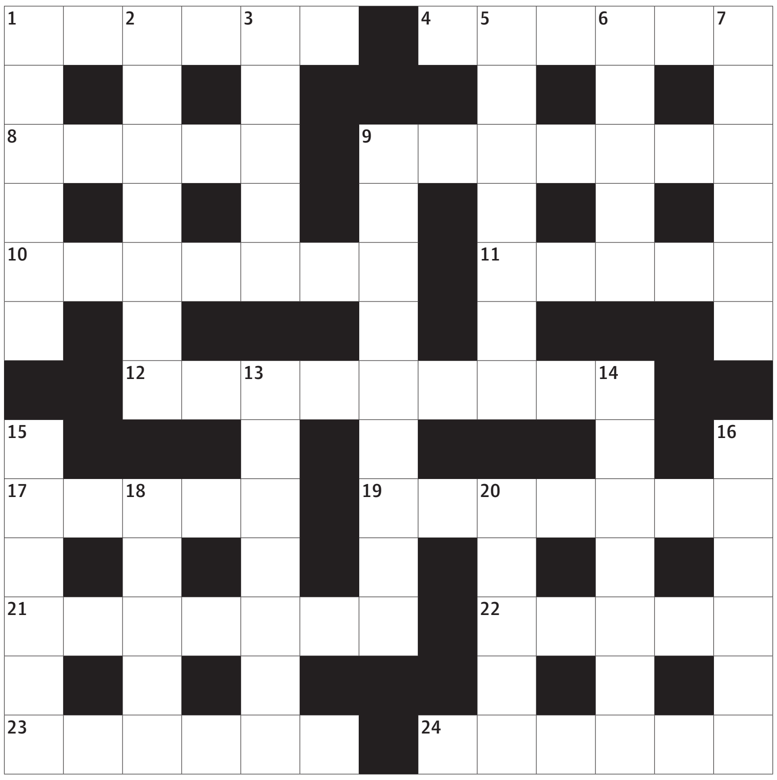
Puzzles



Quick crossword no 17,555

Across
1 Big mistake (6)
4 One quarter of a deck (6)
8 Conditions of a business deal (5)
9 Big lie (7)
10 Insipid (7)
11 Old-fashioned anaesthetic (5)
12 Record player (9)
17 Hurled (5)
19 Big fire (7)
21 Warning signal (3,4)
22 Extract (5)
23 Bear - stick (6)
24 Close-fitting necklace (6)

Down
1 Contract killer (6)
2 Gym session (7)
3 Attempt (5)
5 "Actions speak louder than words", for instance (7)
6 It goes from top to bottom (5)
7 French existentialist Jean-Paul ___ (6)
9 Hulk Hogan's line of work (9)
13 Frequent customer (7)
14 Identify (7)
15 Rollercoaster effect? (1-5)
16 Take trouble (6)
18 Reversed (5)
20 Pollution - vulgarity (5)



To buy puzzle books, visit guardianbookshop.com or call 0330 333 6846.

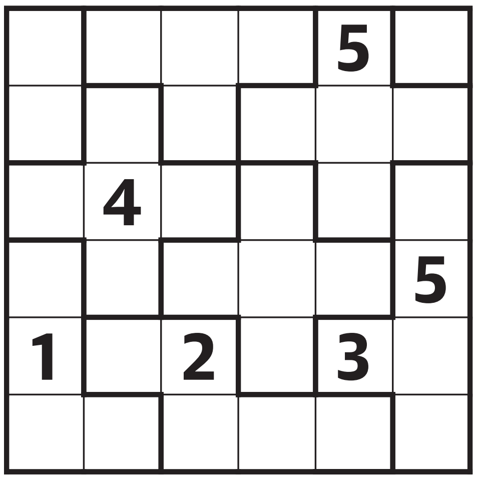
Sudoku no 7,413

Medium. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9. Printable version at theguardian.com/sudoku

9	3			8			4	2
5	2						6	8
			9		2			
		5	4		8	6		
		2		7		4		
		9	2		6	3		
			6		3			
2	6						7	3
4	5			2			9	6

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.



				5	
	4				
					5
1		2		3	

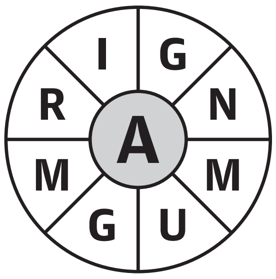
Wordsearch

Can you find 15 shapes in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

H	E	X	A	G	O	N	B	N
V	E	L	C	R	I	C	O	Q
L	S	E	G	A	Z	G	I	Z
O	D	N	O	N	A	G	O	N
C	V	L	C	T	A	S	T	E
T	R	A	P	E	Z	I	U	M
A	H	E	L	I	X	I	R	S
G	H	S	Q	U	A	R	E	T
O	D	N	O	M	A	I	D	A
N	O	G	A	T	N	E	P	R
R	H	O	M	B	U	S	E	L

Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least three others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. Target: 16. Good: 21. Very good: 25. Excellent: 29



Trivia corner

Rapa Nui in the Pacific was renamed Easter Island by the Dutch, but it has an even older Indigenous name. What's the English translation?
a. Far From Anywhere
b. The World's Navel
c. Place of Moai
d. Clear Waters
Answer top right

TODAY'S TRIVIA CORNER ANSWER **THE WORLD'S NAVEL**